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ABSTRACT

The extent to which current staff development mechanisms in Virginia meet adult basic education (ABE) teachers' needs for skill and knowledge development was the focus of an evaluation. (The state's staff development mechanisms were identified as a centralized resource center, a regionalized training program, a centralized annual conference, and a statewide newsletter.) Data were gathered through the following methods: individual interviews with 50 teachers and administrators; a mail survey of 360 teachers, volunteers, and administrators (72 responses); and focus group interviews with approximately 50 staff, gathered in 6 regional sites throughout the state. The study found that the extent to which any one staff development activity is useful depends upon teacher characteristics and how teachers connect it to their own situation and ways of learning. It also found that development of a staff development system has to do with creating relationships among the delivery structures and across contexts, while remaining respectful of the authority of teachers' knowledge. Staff development and program development must be connected. Recommendations were made for development of a staff development system, local and regional staff development through cluster training, and various staff development programs for administrators and state and local staff. Recommendations also were made to improve the resource center and the newsletter. (The report includes the study questionnaire and lists 26 references.) (KC)

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A Report From
The Virginia Adult Educator's Research Network

# TEACHERS LEARNING: AN EVALUATION OF ABE STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN VIRGINIA

by

Hanna Arlene Fingeret, PhD.
Suzanne Cockley

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July, 1992

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Suzanne Cockley

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## Table of Contents


Acknowledgements ..... i

Chapter 1: Concepts and Practice in Staff Development ..... 1
- Thinking About Literacy and Literacy Education ..... 2
- Competing Conceptualizations of Staff Development ..... 5
- Staff Development and Adult Literacy Education ..... 9
- Implications for Virginia Data Analysis ..... 21

Chapter 2 Method ..... 23
- Advisory Group ..... 23
- Data Collection ..... 24
- Data Analysis ..... 29
- The Setting for this Study ..... 30

Chapter 3 : Findings ..... 37
- The Local Level ..... 37
- The Regional Level ..... 53
- The State Level ..... 57
- Conclusion ..... 69

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations ..... 70
- Conclusions ..... 70
- Recommendations ..... 77
- A Suggested Timeline ..... 89
- Continuing Evaluation ..... 90
- Conclusion ..... 93

References ..... 94

Appendix ..... 96
- Survey
- Survey Sample
- Focus Group Letter
- Interview Sample Characteristics

## Chapter 1: Concepts and Practice in Staff Development: The Context for this Study

There has been an explosion of interest in adult literacy education in the U.S. in the last decade, stemming from concerns with everything from global economic competitiveness to traditional family values. New players have entered the arena from the private and public sectors, calling for and, sometimes, funding new initiatives to provide literacy education to more people in more places for more purposes than ever before.

Most of these calls to action assume that teachers and administrators already have the skills and knowledge they need to respond. However, increasing our capacity to provide effective literacy education requires more than simply doing "more of the same." The present system serves no more than 10 percent of those adults potentially in need of services nationwide. Serving larger numbers will require some fundamental shifts: new ways of understanding the problem; new ways of thinking about responses; new involvement of staff, teachers and learners; and new paradigms for thinking about developing our ability to respond. Staff development is essential in this context, and we are challenged to think about staff development in ways that will enhance the ability of the *system* to respond to adult learners, not simply to think about developing the skills and knowledge of individual teachers.

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) program in Virginia has been putting in place a set of training and support structures designed to help teachers improve their skills and knowledge. This present 353 Special Project was designed to take stock of how effective these mechanisms have been in order to provide some sense of direction for future development. The central purpose of the project is to identify the extent to which current staff development mechanisms in Virginia -- a centralized resource center, a regionalized training program (Cluster Training), a centralized annual conference (VAILL), and a

statewide newsletter (Progress) -- meet teachers' needs for skill and knowledge development.

In this first chapter of our final report, we begin by exploring current cognitive science notions of literacy development and learning, then we explore two competing conceptualizations of staff development that are present in the literature, and finally we propose a conceptual framework for examining Virginia's staff development efforts. In the next chapter we describe the methods we used to design the project, collect data and analyze the results. In the third chapter we describe our findings and in the fourth chapter we present conclusions and offer some recommendations for future development and ongoing evaluation of staff development in Adult Basic Education in Virginia.

## Thinking About Literacy and Literacy Education

Our models of teaching and learning have changed over the years as cognitive science has become more sophisticated and multi-disciplinary, and as we come to better understand the relationships between the teaching process and the learning process. We begin with an examination of competing concepts of literacy and literacy education because they exemplify ways that our understanding of teaching and learning have changed from a focus on discrete, decontextualized skills to an understanding of skills in social, historical, political, and personal contexts. In addition, the philosophy underlying the preparation of literacy instructors must be consistent with the philosophy underlying instruction in literacy skills. Therefore, it is useful to have a typology for thinking about literacy to provide a framework for examining different approaches to staff development for literacy workers.

There are several competing conceptions of literacy today (this framework is drawn from Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). We are most familiar with what many call the "**literacy as skills**" perspective, since it permeates our public schools. In this view, literacy is seen as a composite of "decontextualized skills regarded as stable across texts and contexts" (Lytle and

Wolfe, 1989, p. 7). This is compatible with what Street (1984) calls the "autonomous model," referring to the idea that literacy exists separately from any specific situation or ideology. This conception of literacy leads to focusing on simple encoding and decoding skills. Similar to this is a notion of "**literacy as tasks**" (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989), in which literacy is viewed as the ability to independently and successfully apply skills to accomplish specific tasks such as filling in forms, pulling information from newspaper ads, or addressing an envelope. There is some sense of context here, since these tasks are socially constructed, but there remains the assumption that successful accomplishment of these tasks is stable across situations and requires only individual skill achievement.

Literacy also can be understood as social and cultural "**practices**;" here we understand that tasks are accomplished within social settings (see Scribner and Cole, 1981). Practices imply a relationship between the persons, the situation, and the resources available. This is consistent with Street's "ideological model;" it is understood that practices vary from cultural group to cultural group.

Finally, there is the perspective of "**literacy as critical reflection and action**" in which literacy is seen as a means for adults to challenge the conventional wisdom, the myths and assumptions underlying their beliefs and perceptions, for the purpose of changing their relationship to the social structures. In this perspective, literacy is, "a process of interpreting the world and developing a consciousness of commonly held values, behaviors, and beliefs as socially and culturally constructed" (Lytle and Wolfe, p. 10). The work of critical theorists such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux is associated with this view of literacy. This perspective challenges mainstream notions of how, where and by whom knowledge is created; it is a philosophy in which action and reflection are intertwined as adults work together for a more just society.

Arguments about the nature of literacy and literacy development often are couched in ideological terms; in the last few years, however, there is growing support from cognitive science for the view of literacy as practices and, to some extent, as critical reflection and action. Cognitive scientists find that cognition and knowledge cannot be separated (see Sticht and McDonald, 1989, for an overview of recent cognitive research supporting this position). This means that what we learn is related to what we already know, how we think, how we are taught and the content of the materials that are used.

Cognitive science addresses learning, broadly -- not just literacy development. The pedagogy implied by cognitive science is based directly on adults' strengths. It starts from the learners' existing cognitive structures that reflect their life experiences and uses those as a foundation upon which to build new skills. In literacy education, this means that the students' existing knowledge about literacy practices (e.g., the social functions of specific reading and writing practices such as writing checks or filling in forms) provides resources that support new learning. It also means that there should be a clear relationship between the process and content of instruction and students' goals. This relationship is embedded within Virginia's stated policy of responsive adult education, which states that adult instruction should be responsive to the students' goals as opposed to a set curriculum.

Staff development, if approached as an opportunity for adult learning, should be consistent with cognitive science as well. This means that teachers' existing knowledge should be respected. It also means that if teachers are to approach literacy development in terms of practices and critical reflection, they must be provided with opportunities in their own learning to experience the kind of authority and power that is central to the role of learners in that model. For example, Virginia is developing a research network that will provide limited financial and technical support for ABE teachers and volunteers who want to conduct action research projects; for many teachers, this will be their first opportunity to

see themselves as experts, interacting with others to generate new knowledge about teaching and learning.

## Competing Conceptualizations of Staff Development

While there are clearly competing schools of philosophy about the purposes, processes and power relationships of staff development in the K-12 literature, these are muck less evident in the staff development literature relating to adult literacy education. The underlying philosophy for staff development is treated as unproblematic in adult literacy education. Discussions of effective staff development practices usually are not placed in the larger framework of program change and increased system effectiveness; nor are they placed in relation to a larger analysis of the role of teachers' knowledge or the power relations that underlie the decision making processes about staff development needs and structures. Much of the call for staff development results from concerns with the quality of literacy education and *assumes* a relationship between additional staff development efforts and enhanced program and instructional effectiveness. However, as Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) explain: "the scant base of empirical research on staff development in adult literacy education makes it difficult to establish relationships among staff entry qualifications, development opportunities for staff, program processes and impacts, and increased effectiveness on the job" (p. 2).

Staff development traditionally has been approached in ways that are similar to seeing literacy as a set of skills; teaching has been viewed as the accumulation of a sufficiently large "bag of tricks, " regardless of programmatic context, and staff development has been viewed as a remediation process in which teachers' skills and knowledge are assessed, gaps identified, and experts called in to fill in the holes. As Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) describe: "The 'status quo in staff development' is defined here as policies and practices that,

implicitly or explicitly, assume literacy practitioners like their adult students have deficiencies needing remediation" (p. 2).

Closely related is a developmental model in which new teachers are viewed as relatively blank slates; pre-service followed by in-service training is designed to help them develop the skills and knowledge that administrators or trainers have determined they need. Remedial and developmental approaches to staff development assume that teachers are relatively passive recipients of knowledge that has been created by others (usually in universities); experts come to tell them about how to do their jobs better (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1991; Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1991).

A third approach to staff development that seems to have seen its heyday in the 1970s is self-directed staff development. A response to the heavily prescribed remediation model, self-directed staff development relied on the teacher to identify learning objectives, create a plan, implement the plan and assess the results. At the same time, however, self-directed staff development remained largely embedded in the "expert" approach. Although teachers identified their own objectives, they rarely were encouraged to value their own knowledge and to make it central to their inquiry. Rather, they were taught to imitate the schooling model; teachers were often encouraged to draw heavily on the literature and university courses to get responses to their questions from the experts. Teachers might have been in charge of their own learning procedures, but their own knowledge was still largely viewed as suspect.

A competing model of staff development has been developing in the last decade, mirroring literacy education's concerns with practices, critical reflection and action. In this model teachers' experience and knowledge are valued and provide the base for continuing inquiry, learning and action. Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) argue that staff development that helps the field move forward, "requires developing and studying a range

of nontraditional approaches to staff and professional development, approaches that build on the richness and diversity of real-world experience and knowledge teachers, tutors and administrators currently bring to the field" (pp. 2-3). Such approaches are rooted in practitioners' questions and problems in their practice and from practitioners' critical reading and interactions.

Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) summarize the movement in public school teacher education and staff development literature in the last decade, describing the shift in underlying assumptions and definitions:

> The literature on staff development reflects several conflicting conceptions of teaching, of learning and of staff development itself. Although somewhat simplified for the purposes of this discussion, the major difference in underlying assumptions appears between programs that regard teachers as passive recipients, needing to be trained and improved throughout their professional lifespan, and programs that regard teachers as reflective and proactive, stressing their roles in collaborative learning networks and their functions within different levels of the system and across larger cultural, social and political milieus. (pp. 11-12)

They continue:

> Reflecting this changed approach...the language surrounding discussions of staff development has thus undergone considerable change. Rather than altering peoples' practices, beliefs and understandings, or training teachers by transmitting to them predetermined skills and knowledge, the new rhetoric assumes the participants to be active constructors of their own professional practice, acquiring and generating knowledge as members of educational communities rather than primarily as individual actors. (p. 12)

This model of staff development is sometimes referred to as action research or teacher inquiry; we prefer the term "inquiry-based model" (Sparks and Louckes-Horsley, 1990, as cited by Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1991; Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990, 1991) because this implies a number of activities and their relationships (i.e., a model).

Teacher research is one of the central activities of inquiry-based staff development, and an extensive literature on teacher research in public schools has developed in the last

decade. Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990) use the following definition of teacher research: "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 84). They explain:

> By systematic we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. This term also refers to ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analyzing classroom events for which there may be only partial or unwritten records. By intentional we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous, although we do not mean to suggest that important insights about teaching are generated only when planned.... By inquiry, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences -- to adopt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life. (p. 84)

Susan Lytle, at the National Center for Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, has been working with a group of graduate students and literacy practitioners to adapt the teacher research/inquiry model for adult literacy education. They assert that inquiry-based staff development also helps practitioners move into new roles "as learners, researchers and reformers" (Lytle, Belzer, Reumann, 1991, pp. 2-3).

The goal of teacher research is not just to conduct research; teacher researchers are committed to solving problems and developing insight into the questions and problems that emerge for them in their own practice. In the process, they may work together for change in the school or in their professional communities; the underlying motivation has to do with a sense of responsibility to their own students (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, nd). Thus, there is a range of outcomes from participation in teacher research. Goswami and Stillman (1987, cited in Gomez, 1988) cite six positive outcomes of teacher inquiry:

> 1. Their teaching is transformed.... They become theorists articulating their intentions, testing their assumptions, and finding connections with practice.
>
> 2. Their perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers are transformed. They step up their use of resources; they form networks; and they become more active professionally.

> 3. They become rich resources who can provide the profession with information it simply doesn't have.... Teachers know their classrooms and students in ways that outsiders can't.
>
> 4. They become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, less apt to accept uncritically others' theories, less vulnerable to fads, and more authoritative in their assessment of curricula and materials.
>
> 5. They can study writing and learning and report their findings without spending large sums of money (although they must have support and recognition)....
>
> 6. They collaborate with their students to answer questions important to both, drawing on community resources in new and unexpected ways. The nature of teacher-student relations changes when inquiry begins. Working with teachers to answer real questions increases students' motivation to talk, read, and write and has the potential for helping them achieve mature language skills. (pp. 19-20)

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990; 1991) affirm the importance of teacher research for contributing to the knowledge base about teaching and for staff development. They add that teacher research also can contribute to school reform.

Inquiry-based staff development can include a range of activities in addition to teacher research; they are grounded in teachers' knowledge and teachers' questions. Lieberman and Miller (1991) summarize the kind of shift that has to take place in our thinking if we view staff development as inquiry-based rather than knowledge-based:

> When viewed as inquiry-based action, staff development depends less on expert workshops and more on teacher-led activities, such as study groups, curriculum writing, action research, peer observation, case conferences, program evaluation, trying out new practices, teacher centers, and participation in outside events and organizations. (p. 107)

## Staff Development and Adult Literacy Education

There are a number of important lessons in the public school staff development literature; when applied to the literature of adult basic education, a number of themes emerge clearly. Foremost, we need to recognize that, "Staff development as training and remediation is an outdated model, based on formulations of teaching and learning that are

currently being challenged and replaced" (Lieberman and Miller, 1991). The implications of this insight are explored in this section.

The need for a critical perspective.

Adult literacy staff development activities tend to reflect the expert model; although there is a move to provide increasingly sophisticated training within this model, the larger framework of assumptions about teachers' knowledge, power and authority remains largely unexamined. The literature in staff development in adult basic education also reflects a lack of critical analysis of the assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that are embedded in current staff development practice. Although some nontraditional activities may be embraced, such as action research, the larger political, social, and philosophical questions are not raised. For example, in her discussion of professionalization in the field, Foster (1990) says, "Literacy practitioners need to become major contributors to an action-based research agenda that will result in the development of more informed training practices" (p. 82). If training is meant literally here -- in the sense of the traditional expert model -- then an action-based research agenda cannot truly be grounded in teachers' authority. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (nd) remind us:

> In contrast to the technical model of professionalization [training] wherein the teacher is an increasingly sophisticated consumer of other people's knowledge, the teacher researcher movement is based on the notion that a professional plays a participatory role in the creation and use of knowledge in the field. (p. 7)

There is some attempt to develop more sophisticated training models (e.g., Boshier, 1985; Merriam, 1985), but with no questioning of the underlying assumptions. Thus, the language of action research and inquiry-based staff development becomes defined within the traditional models rather than defining an alternative paradigm. Furthermore, the staff development agenda continues to be determined by administrators and staff development experts, and the role of teachers' knowledge stays largely unexplored.

The need to problematize the knowledge base in adult literacy.

The traditional remedial approach to staff development tends to conceptualize the "knowledge base" as known and content-based; the expert is responsible for communicating it to teachers. "Transfer," or the process of teachers taking techniques they were taught in workshops and using them in their classrooms, becomes a central focus for staff developers working in this model.

Authors such as Guskey (1986), trying to make the traditional model more sophisticated, nonetheless retain an orientation to staff development as something imposed from the outside. Although Guskey sees staff development as a change process (as opposed to simply the accumulation of more techniques), he still talks about an outside expert as the "purveyor of...new practices" (p. 9), who needs to convince teachers of the need for change.

In an inquiry-based model the knowledge base is problematic rather than known. Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) explain, "There are at least two interrelated issues here: the concept of 'knowledge base' that provides state-of-the-art direction for practice, and the roles practitioners play in the generation and use of new knowledge" (p. 25). A more teacher-centered or inquiry-based approach to staff development includes teachers as generators of knowledge rather than simply as receivers or users (Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1991). For example, Gomez (1988) asserts that the success of the National Writing Project is partly based on its respect for teachers' knowledge: "Because the NWP network appears to applaud and validate the successful daily experiences of teachers and asks that those be shared with others, it honors teachers not as technicians but as knowledge-makers" (p. 17).

Teachers' knowledge differs from knowledge generated through other means. For example, Myers (nd) explains part of the nature of teachers' knowledge in a description of the National Writing Project (NWP):

> Instead of preparing teacher-proof materials or hiring outside experts who have never taught in a K-12 classroom, the NWP decided to train good teachers to train other teachers in the design of writing lessons for the classroom. What good teachers know that researchers and other nonteachers do not know is the problem-solving strategies for adapting a particular focus on writing to the variables existent in a given classroom. (p. 34)

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1991) argue persuasively that knowledge generated by teachers and other practitioners not only helps these educators to improve their practice, it also contributes to the larger body of knowledge about effective education practice.

Shor (1987) and Freire and Macedo (1987), as well as other scholars in critical pedagogy and school reform, discuss the importance of problematizing our approach to teaching and learning. They criticize the dominant paradigm in which teachers, for example, bring problems to experts so that the experts can engage in problem-solving. They urge a transformation in the way teachers' problems are treated, asserting that the role of the experts should be to help teachers' develop a critical perspective on their problems and issues, exploring questions about underlying power relationships and their relationships to the larger structures of school and society.

<u>The need for staff development to be practiced as an ongoing process, generated by teachers and making use of resources in the environment.</u>

Self-directed learning does not have to be a technique serving the expert model. Rather, it can be viewed as an attitude held by teachers who are actively engaged in constructing knowledge. Teachers may make use of the resources in their environment, such as workshops or conferences, without giving up their sense of control over their own

learning and their authority, grounded in their knowledge from experience and reflection. This is consistent with Spear and Mocker's (1984) concept of an organizing circumstance, "which postulates that self-directed learners, rather than preplanning their learning projects, tend to select a course from limited alternatives which occur fortuitously within their environment, and which structures their learning projects" (p. 4). Teachers involved in staff development may be understood as interacting with the resources in their environment to structure their learning. These resources include people in their programs (administrators, other teachers, students, aides); people outside the programs (friends who are teachers, nonteachers, family, people involved in other programs, state level administrators, university faculty); activities (staff development workshops, conferences, meetings); material resources (journals, newsletters, curricula, resource centers); and the extent to which they teach in an environment which values and supports continuing learning.

Staff development is therefore understood as continuing, since it has to do with teachers' attitudes toward their own growth and development, rather than with the scheduling of workshops. In order to support this understanding, it is important that activities that are provided by local or regional programs or state level offices move away from being mostly episodic, a series of one-shot workshops offered to teachers on a range of topics that they often had no (or a minimal) role in identifying. This kind of scheduling has persisted, in spite of widespread agreement that even in the traditional model some kind of "follow-up," "ongoing support," and "coherence," is essential to growth and change (Guskey, 1986; Jones, 1991; Joyce and Showers, 1983; Pelavin Associates, 1991). For example, Pelavin Associates assert: "Evidence from a variety of sources indicates that single workshops and training sessions without opportunities for follow-up are ineffective in bringing about changes in teacher and volunteer instructor behavior" (p. 8). Smith and

Wigginton (1991) explain the importance of viewing staff development as a continuing process:

> Encouraging and equipping teachers to adopt a different approach to instruction -- as opposed to using a new text or a supplementary classroom activity, such as a simulation -- requires that they own the process of adoption, can try the new approach at their own pace, and adapt the approach to their local situations and personal abilities. That requires time and attention well beyond what courses and workshops are designed to provide -- quality time and extended attention rarely provided by school district staff development programs, professional organizations, or school administrations. (p. 201)

Ongoing support can take a number of forms. Some staff development programs are structured as a series of workshops over a period of time; teachers return to their classes, try out new skills, reflect on their experience, and report back to the next workshop session (Pelavin, 1991). Other programs build in coaching, an idea adapted from public school staff development in which teachers or administrators help each other implement new ideas in the classroom (Joyce and Showers, 1983). Jones (1991) explains:

> Peer coaching rests on the assumptions that in order to implement a new skill effectively a teacher must have repeated demonstrations while in training and, eventually, repeated opportunities to practice in a supportive environment.... Peer coaching programs in follow-up to workshops and training sessions have proven effective not only in helping teachers to master particular skills but in providing the support systems necessary to facilitate transfer from the training setting to the classroom. (p. 11)

Related ideas include peer observation and peer evaluation (Jones, 1991; Pelavin Associates, 1991; Jones and Lowe, 1985); all are extensively recommended in the staff development literature in public schooling and adult education.

Viewing staff development as ongoing also means there must be coherence, as Jones (1991) states:

> An effective staff development program reflects continuity. There must be a relationship between different types of activities (workshops, conferences, courses, independent studies, etc.), all of which must reflect consistent underlying assumptions as they relate to each other in an integrated pattern. (p. 18)

The need for community.

ABE staff development also persists in treating teachers as isolated individuals, even though there is strong evidence from the Foxfire Teacher Networks (Smith and Wigginton, 1991), the National Writing Project (Gomez, 1988), and other projects (e.g., Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990) that it is extremely effective when staff development efforts develop a sense of community -- of being a member of a group with shared values and shared struggles and to which one can contribute as well as learn. Maxine Greene (1991) explains:

> I am suggesting that a concern for personal reality cannot be divorced from a concern for cooperative action within some sort of community. It is when teachers are together as persons, according to norms and principles they have freely chosen, that interest becomes intensified and commitments are made. And this may open pathways to expanded landscapes, richer ways of being human - unique and in the "we -relation" at one and the same time. (p. 13)

ABE teachers are consistently described as isolated; usually this refers literally to physical isolation. Many teachers have little or no interaction with other ABE teachers, working with their students in a local church, housing development, library, public school after hours, student's home, or other community site. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (nd) remind us that isolation is double-edged: "It makes for privacy as well as loneliness, autonomy as well as separation" (p. 5); for some teachers, isolation is seen as desirable.

Many teachers also have little or no interaction with the larger field of adult education. They are part-time, not connected to professional adult education associations, not reading adult education journals, and not receiving local or statewide newsletters because they are not at the central office.

There is another kind of isolation, though: a sense of being isolated because values, beliefs and dreams are not shared, culture is not held in common, and language differs. This feeling of not being part of a community may coexist with physical proximity to other

teachers. In the K-12 staff development literature there is quite a bit of discussion about isolation and community, even though public school teachers are not physically isolated (Gomez, 1988). This reminds us that when we speak of isolation in ABE teaching, we must look beyond geographic and physical constraints. And when people talk about community, we must remember that community is not dependent on physical proximity. Gomez, discussing her interviews with teachers in the National Writing Project, explains:

> The voices of the teachers cited here echo those of others interviewed who talked of isolation, disillusionment, and lack of stimulation prior to their participation in a National Writing Project summer institute. Community, for those teachers, was partially composed of the opportunity to interact with like-minded others, people with similar interests and commitments. (p. 8)

Adult literacy education programs are experimenting with a few community-building mechanisms, including study circles in which teachers come together on a regular basis to explore ideas that are of mutual interest (Pelavin Associates, 1991). Sometimes networks are created as a follow-up strategy and they develop a life of their own, as communities. Smith and Wigginton (1991) explain some of the dimensions of network participation for public school teachers involved in Foxfire Teacher Networks:

> Participation in a network gives a teacher the sense of being able to make a difference by being part of something larger, of being connected with other movements that are complementary to Foxfire, as well as with the other networks. Many network members claim to have a bigger picture of schooling, reforms, and opportunities in education -- and a realization that there is a place in which to share those discoveries -- as a consequence of networking. (p. 206)

Like any other staff development approach, teacher research (or practitioner inquiry) requires a supportive context that, in this case, can function as a kind of intellectual community (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990). When practitioners view themselves as participating in a research community, they stand in a different relationship to their daily conversations, which now become a continuing source of data as well as contributing to the maintenance of the relationships that sustain the community. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle

explain, "In communities for research, teachers use small talk to enter into each other's frames of reference" (p. 14). This means,

> When teachers describe encounters with individual students or the responses of their classes to particular texts or activities, for example, they provide rich information about their day-to-day work and the ways they construct their worlds inside and outside their classrooms. Stories swapped casually acquire more significance when recalled in a different context; advice sought and received may solve an immediate problem, but it may also percolate for a time and then reappear as a different kind of question. (p. 140).

The need for a focus on program improvement.

This highlights one of the major differences between the public school and the adult literacy staff development literature. Many authors who discuss public school staff development have moved from focusing on individual teacher improvement to a focus on larger structures -- schools or districts. Griffin (1991), for example, defines the word "staff" in staff development as referring to the *group* of persons in a school responsible for creating the shared culture of the school. The connection between individual teachers and schools is much more tenuous in adult literacy however; indeed, in many settings one would speak of relationships between teachers and communities or community organizations rather than schools, *per se*. The adult literacy program as an overall environment in which learning and teaching take place is much more invisible in the adult literacy staff development literature than in public school discussions. Griswold (1989), however, discusses her staff development experience in the context of program development:

> The best staff development I've experienced has often taken place in contexts other than what we generally consider "staff development activities." To be sure, I've learned a lot from participating in workshops, attending institutes, hearing speakers, and reading articles. But I think I've learned the most from ongoing discussion and work with groups of other teachers and administrators founded on a specific program issue or concern. Most of these groups have been within the context of the program I was working with at the time; occasionally I've been a part of ongoing groups involving several programs. (p. 2)

Griswold provides specific examples, and explains, "In each of the groups, the staff people participating had a shared interest in the issue. These shared concerns came from regular contact with each other and with our students" (p. 3). Griswold thinks it is important that the groups met over time, included staff with varying levels of experience, and participation was voluntary. They talked, read, wrote, tried out new ideas, and reflected on their experience. She explains, "We could also make program changes on a small scale, observe the changes, and discuss what we found out at each stage in the process" (p. 4). Most importantly when looking at staff development and program change, "Each of these groups had either direct decision making power for the issue involved or the ability to make recommendations to another group within the program where they were sure their suggestions would be considered seriously" (p. 4).

Griswold's experience was fairly unusual because, as she admits, it depended on full-time staff who could come together -- and most adult literacy teachers are part-time. She discusses the importance of administrators making a commitment to hiring more full-time staff and supporting their continuing development as a commitment to overall program quality and effectiveness.

The link between staff development and program development (or, in the terms used by public school authors, school reform) is important; the program's culture affects teachers' orientation to their own ongoing learning. Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991), referring to Foster's (1990) call for professionalization, explain:

> There is little disagreement that practitioners want and need ongoing opportunities for learning. Improving practice and professionalizing the field by developing appropriate content, strategies and infrastructure to make this happen ... depends on looking realistically at the culture of the adult literacy workplace as a potential context for rethinking staff development, at the staff development efforts currently underway, and at how literacy staffs regard those efforts. (p. 16)

Since the focus is on teacher change rather than placing teachers in the context of their programs and communities, staff development remains almost exclusively focused on teachers. Administrators, however, play an important role in creating a climate supportive of growth and learning, providing resources that enable teachers' participation in staff development activities, and providing leadership for particular approaches to literacy education in their programs (Pelavin Associates, 1991). Jones (1991), reviewing findings of K-12 staff development that he believes are useful for adult literacy educators, claims that,

> Teacher change occurs most easily in a climate that encourages collegiality and collaboration...as opposed to competition and isolation, a climate where the administrator is viewed primarily as an instructional leader, and a climate that encourages experimentation and risk-taking, successful or not. (p. 15)

And Smith and Bowes (1986) assert that their study of self-directed staff development shows that specific types of administrative support are essential:

> In terms of successful completion of the project, the type of administrative support seemed to be more important than just the presence or absence of support.... It appears, therefore, that half-hearted administrative support for self-directed staff development results in less enthusiasm and less productivity in the individual learning projects. Administrative support needs to be manifested by direct actions such as interest in the particular topics, release time, or the suggestion of relevant materials. (pp. 85-86)

Nonetheless, staff development in ABE continues to be oriented almost exclusively to teachers, although there is evidence that administrators often have little or no preparation for their roles (Foster, 1990). In inquiry-based staff development, these roles include the ability to support teachers' learning, to raise the program development agenda, and to help the staff deal with the stresses that are generated. It is particularly important that administrators can work together with teachers when present program policy does not support changes that teachers want to make; policy reform can be a collaborative process. As Griffin (1991) says in relation to interactive staff development,

> Interactive staff development does not assume that problems will not be encountered, that frustration will not occur, or that some participants will not report that they feel

> "burned out" as a consequence of working under interactive conditions. Rather, it anticipates these natural phenomena as teachers learn new ways to work more productively together and singly and accounts for it as a matter of course, rather than using the dilemmas and tensions as reasons or excuses to abandon the enterprise. (p. 254-255)

Most importantly, though, is that administrators make a commitment to their own ongoing professional development; administrators' knowledge, like that of teachers, needs to be respected and explored through a number of processes that help administrators come together as a community as well as find their niche in the community of the program -- with teachers, students, and community members.

The need for better working conditions, resources and incentives.

Adult literacy practitioners encounter many obstacles to their own continuing learning. As Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) have documented, practitioners often work in difficult physical conditions and must contend with multiple structural and programmatic barriers to participation in staff development activities. Simple tasks such as making copies become major projects when the duplicating machine is across town or can only be used during non-public school hours. Teachers often are part-time and work in physical isolation from each other. There is a lack of community that, "seems to reflect a workplace culture often characterized by exhaustion, multiple demands, and limited resources" (Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1991, p. 19).

In addition, adult literacy education does not have the public school system's well-developed infrastructure for initial teacher preparation and ongoing staff development (Foster, 1990). There are far fewer university programs dedicated to helping adult literacy educators improve their practice, there are far fewer resources dedicated to this problem by philanthropic organizations and corporate giving offices, and there are fewer incentives built into the programs themselves -- there are rarely salary increases for adult literacy educators who accumulate graduate credits, for example. Adult literacy teachers tend to be

paid much less than are public school teachers, jobs are usually part-time with no benefits. In short, there are almost no opportunities for a career in adult literacy education (Foster, 1990).

In adult literacy education, training and staff development often are not paid for by the literacy program; in fact, it is not unusual for adult literacy instructors in funded programs to have to pay for their own substitutes if they want to attend a workshop during their usual teaching hours. Foster (1990) sums up the current prevailing state of staff development practices in public programs:

> In most states, in-service training requirements are minimal and largely consist of voluntary attendance at group discussions, lectures, or seminars. These sessions are episodic in nature and are offered as freestanding programs rather than as part of a continuum of training. Few standards exist to specify qualifications for those providing instruction in such programs. Released time is rarely provided for attendance. Minimal requirements are often met by offering conferences that can be attended on a voluntary, nonreimbursable basis by the staff of local adult literacy programs. (p. 76)

All of these issues contribute to the difficulty of building a coherent model of staff development in Adult Basic Education. With most adult literacy workers engaging in this field as a secondary professional concern (Boshier, 1985) and drawn extensively from the group of public school teachers, it is difficult for literacy workers to come together to focus on their relationship to staff development and to make demands for respect for their experience and knowledge.

## Implications for Virginia Data Analysis

This review of the staff development literature and practices in adult literacy and public school education leads us to examine the broad perspectives of teachers about their own continuing learning, rather than simply focusing on their participation in ABE staff development mechanisms and activities sponsored by the state. It provides a framework for analyzing our data that will focus on teachers' relationship to their own knowledge and on

the model of staff development -- remediation or inquiry -- that appears to inform staff development efforts at the state level in Virginia. It highlights the centrality of definitions of learning and development in assessing the effectiveness of staff development efforts, and it illustrates the importance of examining the relationship among the staff development activities.

There are four mechanisms that we have been asked to concentrate on: the centralized resource center, a regionalized training program (Cluster Training), a centralized annual conference (VAILL), and a statewide newsletter (Progress). This analysis of staff development raises a number of additional questions which can be asked of the data collected for this evaluation project. They include:

1. To what extent is there a coherent, critical perspective informing staff development in Virginia?
2. To what extent is the knowledge base problematized?
3. To what extent is staff development viewed as an ongoing process?
4. To what extent are teachers helped to build a sense of belonging to a community?
5. To what extent is there a focus on program improvement rather than on individual teacher change?
6. To what extent are administrators involved in staff development?
7. To what extent is there activity to improve working conditions and to provide resources and incentives for participation in staff development in Virginia?

Teachers' learning depends on interaction with their environment, asking real questions, analyzing and learning new information, and working collaboratively with others to explore a range of possible responses. While it is important not to reify teachers' knowledge, recognizing that it is one of many sources of input into learning and change, it is vital that teachers' knowledge be respected and becomes central to an inquiry-based model of staff development.

## Chapter 2: Method

This evaluation was conducted primarily using qualitative methods. We were able to develop insights into how ABE teachers and, to a lesser extent, volunteers, see their relationship to the state's staff development mechanisms using open-ended focus group and individual interviews as our main approach to gathering data. In addition, we observed workshops, examined documents and administered a survey questionnaire. The methods, sample and setting are described in more detail in this chapter.

### Advisory Group

Our first activity was the formation of an Advisory Group for the project which met twice, at the beginning and during the preliminary analysis. It was composed of state staff and field practitioners, and provided valuable suggestions which made the project more practical and relevant. For example, at the first meeting, the group members discouraged the original plan to choose focus group sites on a random or geographic basis. Instead they suggested particular populations which should be involved in the group interviews. These groups were: teachers who rarely participate in any of the state sponsored activities, teachers who have many years of experience with adult education and who participate regularly in staff development, English as a Second Language teachers, and teachers who have participated in state sponsored research projects ( this program is known as VACIL -- Virginia Cadre for Instructional Leadership). In addition, they suggested we aim for a combination of rural and urban teachers, ABE teachers and volunteer literacy tutors, single program and mixed program groups and at least a representative number of minority practitioners.

During analysis the Advisory Group provided a "sounding board" for the preliminary results of the study and a validation mechanism. They confirmed the major findings,

suggested directions for additional data collection, and raised additional questions for analysis. The research team also consulted with members of the Advisory Group during the project, particularly during the development of the survey and when the focus groups were being set up. By involving key practitioners and state level staff we were able to share ownership of the project and the results. Their participation shaped the study, making it more responsive to the questions being asked by practitioners and state level staff.

## Data Collection

### VAILL Interviews

Approximately 50 individuals were interviewed at the two summer institutes last year (known as VAILL's). These interviews were tape recorded, amidst the general hub-bub of breaks between workshops and the clatter of dishes during lunch. On several evenings we invited interested people back to discuss the project in informal groups in a quiet meeting room. After getting some basic information about the number of years they had been teaching adults and the number of VAILL's they had attended prior to this one, we discussed their perceptions of the strengths and limits of VAILL, followed by a more general conversation about staff development and their own learning. Although much of our sampling was convenience -- we talked with people who were accessible and willing to talk -- we made sure that we included a range of types of participation in the conference (e.g., participation in the entire strand for new teachers as well as teachers who seemed to be sitting out most of the formal sessions). We also purposefully included teachers and administrators from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds.

### Survey

The survey was developed by the research team in consultation with the Advisory Group. The survey asked teachers to describe the extent to which they participate in various

staff development mechanisms, and their assessment of the usefulness of each. In addition, the survey asked teachers to reflect on their continuing learning more generally, and to identify the kind of questions they have and where they turn for help when they feel stuck (see Appendix for questionnaire). Our intent was to administer the survey to as many teachers and volunteers as possible to complement the more in-depth information we gathered from the group interviews.

We developed a mailing list of teachers, tutors and administrators in the state from the state-sponsored newsletter, Progress, and the mail list from the Office of Volunteer Training. These two lists combined totaled 360 addresses. Two weeks after the survey was mailed, a reminder post card was mailed to all of the addresses. We received 72 completed surveys (21%). Over three dozen surveys and cards were returned due to wrong addresses. In addition, many teachers in the focus group interviews (which came a month or so after the survey was mailed) reported that they had not received the survey. We were not aware when we began this project that there was no complete mailing list of teachers and volunteers; we did the best we could with the resources available.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were conducted to help us develop indepth understanding of teachers' and volunteers' relationship to staff development and their own learning. They were set up in each of six areas, based on the recommendations of the Advisory Group. The groups represented urban and rural areas, single programs and teachers coming together regionally from multiple programs, teachers who were known to be consistent participants in staff development and teachers known to participate minimally, new teachers and experienced teachers, and paid ABE teachers and volunteers.

In each instance, the administrator or administrators in the area were requested to send a list of all their teachers and/or tutors. Fifteen names were randomly chosen from

each list. These people were sent a letter describing our project and inviting them to participate in a group interview (see Appendix). Each letter listed the time and date of that particular interview and stated that mileage and a small stipend would be paid to the participants. In some cases, depending on the schedule, we also offered to pay for lunch. The letters ended by asking interested persons to call an 800 number to reserve a place at the interview. We hoped to get 8 to 10 at each interview and ended up with 6 to 8. When individuals called and said they would like to participate, we sent them a letter of agreement for them to sign and return. We set up the interviews at easily accessible places, such as public libraries and learning centers.

In some sites, we received no response. Sue Cockley called these teachers and found that they were teaching in public school and many of them wanted to come to the interview, but had no substitutes. She then contacted the ABE administrators in those areas and they were willing to provide substitutes for these teachers.

The group interviews typically began by asking the teachers or tutors their first name, how many years they had been teaching adults and what kind of class they taught. This gave us important information and allowed the transcriber listening to the tape at a later date to connect names with voices. We followed by inviting the participants to talk about their first day (or night) on the job. This led easily into talk about the kind of preparation they had before entering the classroom. We always asked the participants to talk about what they had found most useful in their own learning, and what they did when they needed help solving a classroom problem. We ended by asking specifically about their experience with each of the four state sponsored activities and concluded with the question "What message do you want to send to Richmond about staff development?"

Individual Interviews

As part of the validation process, the Advisory Group responded to our preliminary analysis. As a result of that meeting, the Advisory Group suggested that we interview additional administrators, since the role of administrators was so important. We also found strong evidence of teachers depending on other teachers for advice on classroom problems, but we did not know the extent to which this was true for teachers in isolated rural areas as well as urban areas, so the Advisory Group suggested that we interview additional rural teachers. We also needed more information about the difference in perspective between more and less experienced teachers.

These individual interviews were conducted on the telephone. The sample included some individuals who had participated in focus group interviews or in individual or group interviews at VAILL. Others were chosen because they were particularly isolated teachers or administrators. These data are included in the final analysis.

The Sample

*Surveys*. There were 72 surveys returned with enough completed information that we could use them as part of the sample. About 84% were from females; we did not ask for information about race. Respondents often described themselves as being involved in more than one type of teaching situation; the majority (63%) checked off "One-to-one teaching," in some cases concurrently with "multi-level group classes." The large majority of the respondents (73%) also claim they are working at sites where there are from one to five teachers, and that they teach from one to five students per week. About 40% of the sample say they have been teaching from one to two years, and another 32% has been teaching up to five years. This is all implies that the surveys were returned primarily by relatively new

female volunteer tutors. This is further supported by their describing their initial training as Laubach or LVA in the majority of cases (53%).

*Focus groups and individual interviews.* Individual interviews were conducted at VAILL (ABE and ESL) and over the telephone. Focus groups were conducted at six locations in Virginia and less formal group interviews were conducted at VAILL. As you can see from Table 1, the majority of the persons interviewed were white female teachers from urban backgrounds in their 30s and 40s who have been teaching five years or less. For this reason, validation and follow-up interviews were conducted with administrators and experienced teachers. We also tried to make sure we had a large enough sample of African American teachers and administrators to be able to draw some conclusions about issues that might be particularly related to race and ethnicity.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Interview Sample

Total number of persons interviewed: 97

Role (some persons are in more than one category)

| | |
|---|---|
| Teachers and volunteer tutors | 72 (10 specifically identified as volunteers) |
| Administrators (ABE and vol.) | 13 |
| Specialists and trainers | 10 |
| State staff | 6 |
| Primarily ESL | 24 |

| Gender | | Location | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 78 | Rural | 41 |
| Male | 19 | Urban | 56 |

| Age | | Years of experience | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20s | 3 | 0 - 2 | 16 |
| 30s | 27 | 3 - 5 | 35 |
| 40s | 33 | 6 - 10 | 15 |
| 50s | 16 | 10+ | 15 |
| 60+ | 4 | Unknown | 16 |
| Unknown | 14 | | |

Table 1 continued

| | |
|---|---|
| Race | |
| White | 81 |
| African American | 15 |
| Other | 1 |

**The names of persons quoted in this report have been changed to protect their confidentiality;** individuals are quoted in the narrative to represent the thoughts and opinions of the group with which they are identified.

## Data Analysis and Validation

Data from all the interviews was transcribed onto computer disk and then printed out (totaling almost 1,000 pages). The interviewer read every page of transcript while listening to the tape to make corrections. Next, after a cursory reading of the data, each interviewer (Hanna Fingeret and Suzanne Cockley) identified categories in the information. These included topics such as types of learning activities mentioned, characteristics of good workshops, descriptions of how teachers say they have changed what they do and less related topics like the desire for teacher benefits, descriptions of teaching techniques, etc.

Every comment was coded, and sometimes double and triple coded, and placed in the appropriate category. Suzanne Cockley did this manually, cutting the transcripts into strips and placing them in file folders. Hanna Fingeret used a computer program to do the same manual tasks. After manipulating the data in such an intense way, themes began to emerge. The researchers compared themes and jointly developed a preliminary analysis.

One of the main ways to validate qualitative analysis is to return to some of the original informants or to present the preliminary analysis to a group similar to those informants. We presented the preliminary analysis to two such groups. The first consisted of two members of the state staff, one of whom was interviewed during the initial data collection. The second was our Advisory Group which included state staff, local teachers, and administrators. Both groups confirmed the emerging findings and analytical framework; they suggested we conduct the individual interviews described in the previous section.

The survey was analyzed manually; there were not enough respondents with specific characteristics (e.g., volunteers, ABE teachers, teaching more than 3 years) to allow for the appropriate use of statistical analysis. When the survey was analyzed, we realized that some of the questions were poorly worded and did not give us the information we needed. The most glaring mistake was the omission of any question which identified the respondent as an ABE teacher, a GED teacher or a volunteer tutor. We did ask for the number of students the respondent taught, and for all who answered one or two, we assumed that they were tutors. The majority of returned surveys fell into this category.

## The Setting for this Study:
## An Overview of Present Staff Development Activities in Virginia

Historically, Virginia has put generous amounts of effort and funding into staff development for adult education staff. The staff development activities we examined were, for the most part, organized and well established. In order to put our findings into the proper context, we will describe the various staff development activities, as they are currently functioning, in this section.

**Cluster Training** is designed to provide in-service workshops to teachers across the state. Teachers and volunteer tutors from a region are encouraged to attend these workshops. In this way, many teachers from a large area can benefit from exposure to speakers on a variety of topics several times a year. These workshops are generally requested by an administrator or a Specialist in the area. Sometimes the person requesting a workshop has gathered the teachers in the region together to get suggestions from them on topics for the workshop, but this is not always the case. The person requesting the workshop fills out a form for the Cluster Training coordinator, with information about the training needs of the group, the learning objectives set for the workshop and the cost of the workshop. The coordinator then contacts an appropriate speaker and sets up a meeting place.

Cluster Training funds cover a stipend for the speaker, transportation for the participants and perhaps a meal or meeting room charge. Workshops range in length from a couple hours to a full day. Some regions request several workshops each year and others have never requested a workshop (we conducted focus group interviews with groups at each end of the spectrum). The Cluster Training office has a number of speakers on its list of consultants, but several have become very popular in recent years, particularly individuals whose fields include learning disabilities, student motivation and self esteem, reading skills strategies and using the newspaper in the adult education classroom.

In the last three years, there have been three coordinators of the Cluster Training program. The current coordinator had been there four months at the time of our interview. The emphasis through all these changes has remained with being responsive to requests from the field. There is currently some concern that this focus produces a hit-or-miss effect which results in spotty staff development. One staff member told us:

> Across the state, there's not any common thread necessarily that runs through. . . . You bring on a teacher in some county, and it's their first year, and they take advantage of a certain number of staff development things. That person may be exposed to a learning disabilities workshop, and a session on language experience approach or something like that and that's their training all year. And somebody else gets something else. . . . And something about that seems strange to me. It's great as icing on the cake, but it seems like the cake is missing.

Virginia has been sponsoring a summer conference, called **Virginia Adult Institute for Lifelong Learning (VAILL)** since the 1980's in some form or another. All adult education staff and volunteer tutors in the state are encouraged to attend. There is no fee for the conference. The VAILL conference currently lasts a total of two days and is held at a university, making use of dormitories for overnight accommodations and dining halls for meals. Earlier VAILL conferences lasted a week. Different VAILL coordinators have experimented with the format, with the emphasis on an 8 hour strand which participants signed up for before the conference, or many 45 minute workshops which were offered on a first come, first served basis. Previous VAILLs have featured an **Action Research** component. Participants were invited to continue studying a topic during the school year, developing ways to use their learning in their classrooms. These teachers met during the year and kept journals of their experiences. College credit was offered and could be used towards re-certification. A VAILL planner explained the purpose of the conferences as

> the principle time of year when you come together and you disseminate broad ideas in terms of projecting what will be for the future and disseminating what is taking place...Two pieces. One, projects that have done well and [two], training that has been developed, that is to be shared.

This year (summer, 1991) the first VAILL conference specifically for ESL teachers and administrators was held. Before this year, several workshops at the basically ABE-oriented VAILL were set aside for ESL interests. One staff member said, "[The planners of previous VAILLs] got feedback from evaluations. It was a kind of tokenism for ESL. It was a little, but not enough." This new arrangement is welcomed by many ESL staff who conceptualize their work as very different from ABE. As one conference coordinator put it, "It was an

opportunity to have the kind of VAILL I always wished we could have." The ESL VAILL was structured around strands. The planners also incorporated organized discussion groups on various topics, which emphasized the networking aspect of VAILL.

Next year there will be three VAILL conferences - one ESL in Northern Virginia, one ABE at Virginia State University and another ABE at Hollins College. One staff member expressed some concern about this change. "I think that it's going to wind up with everyone in the Valley going [to Hollins], everybody in ESL in Northern Virginia going there and then the central part going [to Virginia State]. And that's going to pit three groups against each other all the way through."

Each VAILL conference is arranged by contract with an institution, generally the college or university which will host the conference. Each host relies upon an advisory group to make suggestions regarding format, topics, speakers, etc. These advisory groups are generally made up of adult educators -- mostly Specialists, administrators and a few teachers.

**The Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Resource Center** is located at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. It has two main functions. The first is to operate the Virginia Literacy Hotline, an 800 number which anyone in Virginia can call to receive information about literacy and adult education opportunities in the state. Callers who need a tutor or information about classes are given the address and phone number of a local adult education provider. Callers who are interested in becoming tutors are given the same information.

The second function is to accumulate materials - both instructional and professional - which adult educators around the state may borrow to pre-view. These items are to be used as references, not samples or classroom materials. A staff person described the Center as a library for teachers. Teachers can come to the Resource Center (the Center has conducted

several workshops for teachers on location to promote the use of the materials) or they can phone and ask for information. Requested materials are mailed to teachers for a pre-determined length of time, when they are due back to the Center with an evaluation. Recently, the Center has begun a program which pays teachers to use new materials and write in-depth evaluations to be published in the Center's catalogue. Every year there are many new materials available and the coordinator must choose among them according to the budget allotted to the Center and the space available. There are dilemmas involved with these choices. A staff person told us that in many aspects the Center is responsive to the field, yet this person also has a vision for the type of services the Center could offer:

> Many [teachers] would just like to borrow materials [which are the] quickest - How to Teach Adult Ed in One Hour – this kind of thing. And I try to steer them away from that . . . you know, handbooks. To me, they should be looking [for] the more stimulating, intellectual activity as a professional person. . . . I see where there are so many things that I could do, and I am in a position to implement a change for the better.

Virginia Commonwealth University is also host to the **Office of Training for Volunteer Literacy Providers**. This project is sponsored jointly between the Adult Education Service and the Virginia Literacy Foundation. The mission of the office is to provide training and assistance to the volunteer literacy groups throughout the state. This project was not included in the list of programs we were asked to evaluate, but we became familiar with it because it's activities fall in the category of staff development. The staff person we spoke with sees his role in terms of responsiveness to the autonomous literacy providers in the field, as opposed to providing an overall training program:

> I think to a large extent what I do is reactive because every now and then I come across a great idea. I stumble across it or I'm sitting there and it just sort of comes out. But that idea is only as good as the delivery that you can make to the people that need it.

Virginia has had an adult education newsletter for several years, but it has undergone some changes. A previous newsletter was produced by educators and was focused on teachers and classroom techniques. The present **newsletter, Progress**, is more directly

influenced by the state staff and provides a wealth of information about the issues concerning adult education at the state level. A staff person told us, "The newsletter as it is right now, is designed more to be a dissemination piece. A kind of information piece." The current contractor for this project uses articles written or suggested by state staff. During the publication of Progress many changes have taken place in the position of adult education relative to public education as a whole in Virginia. Articles have kept the field informed of these changes.

Throughout the years, the state staff has supported a variety of pilot projects which can be broadly defined as staff development. The most significant of these is the **Virginia Cadre for Instructional Leadership** (VACIL) project. Teachers were asked to volunteer to work with this project for one year. The state staff identified instructional problems/issues for this group of teachers to experiment with in their classrooms. They met several times to discuss their progress and to hear experts in related fields speak about the topic. Their job was to take theory related to the issue and find ways to make practical applications in their classrooms. At the end of the year they each wrote up their experience in the form of lesson plans and these pieces were gathered together and re-produced. Booklets of sample lesson plans were distributed to adult education programs throughout the state. VACIL projects have been sponsored twice and we spoke with representatives from each group in a focus group interview.

In addition to local administrators and program planners who handle the daily management concerns of each adult education program, Virginia has placed adult education **Specialists** in the rural areas of the state. Specialists assist administrators by providing staff development planning, instructional technical assistance for teachers, student recruitment planning, assistance in workplace program initiation and networking with local social service agencies and businesses. They receive little formal training for their jobs, but they do meet regularly during the year to share ideas and concerns and to receive

direction from state staff members. The Specialists have become an important part of adult education in Virginia by providing help to small and developing programs and conveying information and new ideas between the state office and the field.

During the year we studied staff development, the **Virginia Adult Educators Research Network** was established. This program will promote research conducted by teachers in their classrooms, sometimes on their own, sometimes in collaboration with university researchers or other teachers. The Network will also manage research projects for the state and promote adult education research at Virginia universities.

## Chapter 3: Findings

The individual teacher is in the center of our view of staff development. We began this study by examining the extent to which state level staff development mechanisms were meeting teachers' needs. However, teachers did not talk about the effectiveness of discrete workshops or other experiences. Instead, they talked about the extent to which they were able to use new skills or knowledge from a workshop to answer their own questions or to respond to issues in their classrooms. This led us to focus on how teachers construct their own learning -- the ways in which they use their own experience, the local program, regional opportunities, state level mechanisms, and other resources to continue developing their skills and knowledge in relation to literacy education. Beginning with knowledge which comes from the teacher and the students in a classroom or a tutoring relationship, our findings are grouped according to their distance from the teacher, moving to the local program, regional and state levels.

### The Local Level

**The teachers** who participated in interviews and responded to the survey are diverse. When we asked experienced teachers how their teaching has changed in the past few years, most responded that they have some increased flexibility as they have gotten to know their students better and become more secure in their skills and knowledge. They say that they make the content more relevant to their students than in the past. One teacher wrote: "The more I work with adults, the more I realize the necessity of making the learning relevant to their lives. I'm placing more emphasis on critical thinking and real life problem-solving."

We wanted to examine these changes which resulted in more flexible and responsive teaching. We used the survey to get an idea of the kinds of questions teachers and volunteers ask about their work. The largest category of responses to the survey question,

"What puzzles you about your teaching experiences?" has to do with students' attitudes and behaviors. These responses tended to reflect a deficit view of learners. For example, one volunteer said she wanted to know how to deal with an "extremely uncommunicative" student, and another wrote, "My nonreaders ...do not put enough extra time to accomplish the goal quickly enough." Many responses depict deep personal struggles to understand students' abilities and inabilities, although continuing to reflect a deficit perspective. For example, one instructor wrote: "Why have I worked with one woman for five years while she has not put forth enough effort to master the skills that I have taught diligently?" while another plaintively asks, "Am I doing all I can to facilitate their progress academically?"

The second largest category of responses to the question, "What puzzles you about your teaching experiences?" has to do with the educational system and the politics of literacy education. It includes responses such as, "Why is teaching adults so low on the priority list?" and "Why are we self-employed with no benefits when adult ed is so important to our country and state and locality?" And the third category of responses to the same question has to do with instruction of adults, with one volunteer asking, "How is teaching reading to adults different from other teaching?"

Teachers and volunteers overwhelming responded to the survey question, "Describe the type of help with your own skill development that you would find most helpful at this stage in your teaching career," by asking for resources such as reading lists and curriculum materials, and for access to courses and other kinds of training. They also asked for help in changing their working conditions. They want more time "to prepare and reflect," as well as benefits and "skill in preventing burn out."

Four of the respondents to the survey wrote that they do not believe they need any help. One writes, "At this stage (30 years in a classroom) I am retired," and another write, "I have taught school for 34 years -- I do not find working with adults that much different

than working with children." An ABE teacher feels, "I just took early retirement after 32 years of teaching and now as a part time instructor I am not seeking much help, to be honest."

**The teachers and students create a context for learning.** Teachers and students bring a wealth of experience to the classroom or tutoring relationship. Teachers can draw on their experience as well as the class to develop new approaches to teaching, try them out, examine their effectiveness, and refine or drop them. Most teachers see their years of teaching in public schools as the most useful and relevant experience they bring to adult education; others cite personal experiences such as international travel, particularly if they are teaching English as a Second Language. Teachers also credit students as a source of assistance with their own learning.

Teachers who have experience in public school classrooms say they transfer this knowledge to their work in adult classrooms. Most teachers of adults in the state are part-time and spend many more hours teaching in a public school classroom than they do teaching adults. They believe that the skill areas they teach in the adult class as very similar to the skill areas they deal with during the day in elementary, middle, or high school classes. Many teachers speak directly about bringing used books and teacher-made worksheets from their grade school work into their class in the evening with adults. They feel that the adults appear to learn and enjoy using the materials. For example, some teachers explain:

> To tell you the truth, the students I've seen do not do well with the [GED] textbooks. They do better with the hands-on activities. I'll run off worksheets to practice skill....I had taught general math for many years. I just picked up what I had been using. [Ruth, teaching for 15 years]

> It's surprising to me how much some of the knowledge I had in teaching second and third grade fits into this program. The phonics, spelling hints, reading for context, not correcting every word and then asking after they're finished, you know, if they understand it and so on. [Abby]

> I think once a teacher, always a teacher. You get all these formal education classes in different arenas, but you're still basically there to impart knowledge to the student and some do it one way and some do it another. [Molly]

Some teachers feel that children and adults are similar as learners; one teacher who has many years' experience in public school and several in adult education says, "I see very little difference in the high school students, the middle school students and the adult education learner in the classroom." Most public school teachers, however, say that they observe differences between younger and older learners. They talk about adults having better motivation to learn, complications from their prior experience, and fewer discipline problems; some teachers explain:

> I think for Adult Education that's important; you have to watch the direction the class wants to take, but also I've learned that adults insist that the time they spend with you be beneficial. They want it to be time well spent so you have to - handle the flexibility issue a bit, you have to have some direction. [Ellis]

> My first two days, I said, "Sit down and be quiet. Get your stuff. Get everything together." And somebody said, "You don't do that to adults." I'm learning to work with adults. [Isaac]

> When I first started, I didn't have a good sense of what adult education is all about. We think about what people learn in public school and we think that somehow we'll get that across to adults, people with different backgrounds and different learning problems, people who bring with them a lot of baggage. But you learn to recognize some of the baggage that people bring with them and learn strategies to help them get around that baggage, and that's really helpful. You can't really just say, "Here's some knowledge." You have to deal with some of the walls people put up about learning.

They also show concern that teaching materials designed for children might be too demeaning for adults and should be avoided. Several teachers list a variety of materials they use in place of or in addition to workbooks, such as newspapers, videos, and written materials the students bring in.

Some teachers report that they learn from their students. In some cases, this comes from observing their students, or students in other classes. Teachers are concerned with students' reactions to new materials and activities, and try to observe how satisfied students

are with their efforts. As Janice reports, "I was observing another teacher and I knew it wasn't working because no one was paying attention....They would be looking out the window or they'd be writing and they weren't looking at her and she'd completely lost them." And Larry shares his experience:

> I just try to figure it out myself. Just from knowing him [a student working on writing] and seeing him work and seeing him make mistakes and so forth, seeing what he needs most, and I discovered in his writing that spelling was a real problem. In fact, his wife did all the writing of the checks. He never wrote a check before I showed him how....And really that's because I noticed that his primary need in the literacy area was in writing and in spelling, so every class period, I give him some practice in that. I dictate sentences, about five sentences, and he has to write them.

Other teachers report learning how to teach adults through discussions with students about their backgrounds, their experiences, and their goals. For example, Kate explains, "You're bringing what you hope will help to class, but they're bringing their own life experience to class, and you have to use that too." And Ellis elaborates, "We have to choose almost consciously to try to get rid of that teacher-student relationship in some ways, and ask them questions about things we need to know, learn from them, share with them."

Teachers in several focus group interviews mention using the Student-Teacher Evaluation Planning Session (STEPS) process to learn about student preferences in regards to materials they liked, tasks they should work on next, long and short term goals. The STEPS program was developed to give teachers a framework for talking with their students about the students' goals for learning. Teachers report that they used the results of STEPS to plan future lessons and order materials.

Other teachers speak of asking students who had taken the GED questions about the content of the test, the difficulty, and the type of essay questions asked, in order to know how to prepare other students. Hazel explains: "I had a fellow who took [the GED]. He said it was a little different from the last time he took it. I asked, 'Have they changed it? or What percentage is word problems?' That helped me change how I teach."

Some teachers learn from other people in their classrooms. For example, teachers who use aides or volunteers describe learning from them; Cathy explains:

> This guy [a student] wanted Algebra, and we had a literacy volunteer with us that night, and he happened to be from a local plant, and I asked him what he did. And he said he was an engineer. And I said, "I bet you know Algebra." And so he was supposed to be assisting with the Reading, but he did the Algebra, and my aide and I sat in, and we actually learned the Algebra. That's how we learned it, from the engineer.

Sometimes the teacher started as an aide, and learned that way:

> I worked as an aide with Cathy from March to June, or something like that. About three months. So I wasn't put in just totally cold not knowing anything about it, not having had any professional development or any formal instruction to begin with....I picked up lots of teaching techniques and examples, and one in particular - that when she teaches positive and negative integers, and she relates it to a dinner. And I've used it over and over and over, and you know, you teach it traditionally and then that doesn't work and I throw in Cathy's dinner experience, and it always - they always see the light bulb with this. And her style. I'm sure she was unconscious of what she was passing on to me. And I've modified - I've created my own style now, but I picked up a lot of good things from her that helped me get started without being so klutzy in the beginning. [Molly]

And substitute teaching was also important: "A few years ago I did a lot of substitute teaching, and that's a wonderful education...picking up somebody's lesson plans and putting them to work. It's wonderful....I stole a lot of ideas." [Lois]

Many teachers and volunteers use their personal relationships and prior personal experiences to help them gain insight into how their students learn. Several teachers mention friends and acquaintances who, because of their occupations or other characteristics, have been helpful. An ESL teacher who was born in another country told us how she uses her relationships with other newly-arrived people to help her understand how people in her class from different cultures have different needs. And Maria explains how her personal experience supports her teaching:

> Well, I know some teachers in Northern Virginia and sometimes also people who are from another country and are learning English. I have pretty good contact with people

coming from another country and their needs. I myself come from another country and I have learned several languages, so in a way that helps me a lot. Because when my students start talking I know what level they're on. So it's kind of personal experience that helps me.

A few teachers we interviewed turn to the professional literature for help developing their teaching skills. For example, one teacher tells about her experience using professional literature in combination with information from a workshop to change her practice in the classroom:

> And sort of on my own this year, I started doing some reading about the whole language approach, which sort of reminds me of the cooperative learning thing that we did in an inservice. I just happened to find this through an article in Teaching Magazine and said, you know, everything else I've done has not -- I don't want to say it's failed, but it really has not had a big enough effect to get these people, who I've had now for the fourth year, to move on. They're not moving, and it's real frustrating at this level. I thought well, let me try this and the more I read about it, the more I thought, well, logistically it's going to be hard for them to understand what they have to do because so much responsibility is put on their shoulders, and the cooperative learning thing helped me to see a way to produce it in the classroom. I have had -- it's only November -- I have had much better results than any of three previous years at Level I, particularly now that they are independent in their work and I can basically be a facilitator. They're doing it and it's the first time in all the things I've tried that something has worked.

The classroom or tutoring relationship is the teachers' most immediate arena of learning. Teachers draw on their personal and professional prior experience and on their interactions with their students and others in their classrooms to move their own skills and knowledge forward.

**The local program provides access to resources for learning.** These resources include administrators, other teachers, materials and publications, inservice workshops and other opportunities for more formal learning, information about staff development opportunities, and, sometimes, funds to support involvement in a range of activities.

The large majority of the ABE teachers with whom we spoke had no or minimal formal training for their jobs. While many depended on their public school teaching background, others have stories similar to this teacher's:

> I had no ABE background, but I feel like I just sort of got into the job and I took the job that had been [a friend's], and she helped me out a little bit, but I just sort of walked in there without anything, and fortunately I've been able to do it by wits and by asking questions of people and getting help, but there hasn't been any formal staff development I've been involved in.

Some teachers had a little more structure as they started:

> We had a group of teachers. Several had already been teaching in the ESL program in the school, and two of us were new. They said, "These are some of the materials that we have been using," and we picked our levels, and we had a chance to look over the materials and decide, "Well, I think this might work," and then go in and try it.

Almost all teachers say they call upon local administrators for information, but not necessarily for help with instruction. Teachers call on their administrators for policy-related information about things such as their budget; how much money they have available for materials (sometimes administrators order them, sometimes teachers do this for themselves); and class size (how many students are needed to fill a class, how many are ready to take the GED, how many pass the GED, how can we get more students). Administrators also are responsible for delineating the range of teachers' job responsibilities, which sometimes includes student recruitment and counseling. In addition, administrators also are often responsible for placing students in appropriate classes. For some teachers, like Roy, maintaining a good relationship with his administrator is pragmatic: "This is the person who has the budget and knows how much money I have. I talk with him every other day." Others feel their administrator is a real support person for their work:

> You know, I feel that I have been working pretty much alone, but my administrator has been really good. He's always been available when I've wanted to talk over something with him. I don't know how he does it, because he is really busy, but he

always has a few minutes to take your call and to discuss an issue with you, or you know, well, "Is it okay if I do this; I know this is not what people usually do, but is it okay if I try this." He's real supportive of anything you want to do. He's been very helpful. [Jan]

While some teachers see their administrators often (many times because they happen to work in the same school building during the day), there are strong statements from other teachers who feel they do not get to speak with their administrator enough to know "what's going on around here." They feel hampered by a lack of information about their programs. For example, in one focus group interview, most of the teachers and tutors had never met each other and were unaware that both paid and volunteer positions were used in the program. The situation was not so extreme in other groups, but teachers elsewhere want to meet more often for administrative updates. These teachers and tutors express a need to know that they are a part of a larger program and that they are connected, by shared information and experiences, to the rest of the program. They want to feel they are part of a team with their administrators and fellow teachers: "We don't know what's available for us....We would like to know the structure, the infrastructure, how it goes....I don't know who does what" [Sally].

In all types of programs, the administrator often plays a central role in the distribution of information about staff development opportunities. The administrator is crucial to the delivery of staff development, whether he or she administers a small program with one teacher or an entire learning center with a large staff. The administrator controls resources (namely the budget) and information about staff development activities. Progress, the state's adult education newsletter, is distributed through program administrators, and VAILL, the summer training institute, uses a mailing list which includes many administrators who are expected to pass information on to the teachers in their programs.

In most cases, teachers say that they know more about instruction than their administrators do and that their administrators acknowledge this to be true. Roy explains

that his administrator treats whatever Roy says as the "gospel. " He continues, "I ask about budget things, but not much about curriculum things. He looks to me as the expert."

Teachers appreciate the freedom that many administrators give them to try new ideas. They have praise for administrators who let them take the lead in instructional matters such as choosing books, deciding how to manage classes, and deciding when a student is ready to take the GED. Sally explains:

> And like you were saying before, you're not in that structured type of thing, which is what I didn't care for. You know, you got so caught up in the paperwork and the rules, and following everything just step by step. You couldn't be creative in any way. You became a little robot. I think that's what I really like about Adult Education.

At the same time, this freedom and autonomy are seen as problematic for many teachers, like Jan: "For anybody who has a real flexible kind of way, which I do - it's almost like too big and too wide for me....That's been my dilemma - it's like, everything is allowed, but then what will be the thing that will be the best use of time....In the beginning it was like overwhelming." And Gale explains further: "There are some people who like to have more structure, who like to be told, "This is what you need to teach" or at least, "This is what we are expecting," and...for the people who are like that, I think it's more difficult than for some who are, you know, real ready to go in there and be very creative."

The administrators with whom we talked see themselves in a way that is consistent with how the teachers see them -- as responsible for creating a climate, providing resources, developing incentives for participation, and disseminating information about staff development opportunities. Most of the administrators portray the teachers in their programs as highly motivated and skilled. However, a few administrators see the teachers they supervise as uninterested in staff development. For example, one administrator says of his staff, "They're locked into what they're doing and how they're doing it. They don't voluntarily say, 'Hey, this year, I'm going after this.'" He believes that there is a difference

between the staff development participation of full time public school teachers who are doing ABE as an additional job, and those teachers who are only working part time in ABE:

> Some of the most professional of them -- the daytime school teachers who do ABE at night -- they don't go [to conferences and workshops] as much as the part time teachers who are not totally involved in education. I try to talk them into it and it usually doesn't work.... I'm blessed with having some pretty high quality folks working for me and there I am telling them they should go to this thing. So, I don't do it in terms of things they need to learn, but for the professional networking. I can't act like there's all this they need to learn and they should go to VAILL to learn it. It's tricky. A lot of teachers, I find they don't like school, where I've always liked the academic situation....Perhaps it's more of a hobby situation for the part time teachers, they enjoy having this sharing. They may not have as much professional contact as the full timers. Full timers do it all the time.

Many administrators are involved in adult basic education in addition to their primary responsibilities in public schools. They are aware that the opportunities for staff development for ABE teachers differ from those available for teachers in the public school. A number of administrators explain that they have mechanisms such as biweekly meetings for public school teachers, for example, but not for the adult education part-time teachers. They may be able to pay public school teachers for their time participating in meetings, but often do not have the resources to pay part-time ABE teachers for participation in similar meetings. Elsa, a trainer and ESL teacher, remembers, "For a time we were paid to go to the workshops, but now the money is gone but people really do want to learn and so they go anyway."

Mischa, an administrator in a small rural volunteer program, is unsure about many of her administrative responsibilities. She would like help; she says, "People often want to help, but they're too busy, so I'll wing it. I wish I had somebody to call. The tutors use me and [my assistant] -- we've been teachers and we're tutoring now, but I don't feel like I have someone to turn to."

Almost all teachers recall instances where observing and talking with other teachers gave them insights into solutions for their own classroom problems. Many teachers

describe interactions with other teachers as central to their own learning and skill development. All the teachers we spoke with agreed, however, that they do not have enough opportunities to talk to other teachers. More than half (54%) of the survey respondents said that they turn to other teachers for help with instructional problems; only 28% identified administrators as their first choice for assistance.

Teachers in geographically isolated rural satellite sites as well as teachers in urban learning centers agree with Kelly's sentiment: "Talking to other teachers has always been the biggest help to me....The biggest benefit of any meeting I have ever been to, from VAILL, to Clusters, to whatever, is sharing your experiences, your books, your knowledge, your everything. That was the way I got my training."

In learning center situations, where teachers work side-by-side with other Adult Ed teachers, sharing resources, lounge areas, and aides, there are many opportunities for interaction and communication. Teachers report seeing each other, with time to talk about work and private lives, on a daily basis. They often share problems and ideas, opinions of materials and methods. Many teachers in Center situations speak about the camaraderie they experience when several teachers worked in adjacent rooms. For example, Helen sums up her experience in ESL:

> I've had a lot of experience in teaching a variety of different kinds of things in different places, and that there's more camaraderie and sharing with ESL teachers than any other group I've ever seen. There's not a feeling of "You're going to steal my ideas" and there's nothing so threatening. But everybody is open, and they'll say, "Oh, that's neat. Could I have one?" "Oh, sure. Help yourself." You'll have some idea about Columbus Day and everyone's willing to help, and it just seems to me that you're never alone.

Urban areas, in general, present many opportunities for staff development and sharing with other teachers. For example, Elsa, a teacher in an urban area, asserts: "If I don't get out and talk to someone it's my own fault. I can call a site and go observe -- we're encouraged to do that. There are enough things offered during times I'm not teaching that it's no

problem." Riding back and forth from inservice workshops also provides opportunities to share ideas with other teachers: "We ride together; we talk about what's going on in our classes. We share a lot together, and we get to know each other better. And that, I think, is good for the teaching all the way around" [Nora].

Geographically isolated teachers in one-teacher situations have to work harder to find people to help them. For example, Lisa explains that, "Just for us to go to the college for a meeting, for me it's 24 miles and sometimes [the coordinator] doesn't have the money to reimburse us for the miles and that cuts down on the number of meetings we can have." And, Lisa continues: "It's not very feasible for us to watch each other -- I teach so many classes, I don't have much free time and if I give up a class I give up pay.... And then, we're really spread out. It could take me an hour to drive to visit someone else's class."

However, rural teachers still present relationships with other teachers as their main source of information about teaching adults. Often rural teachers meet each other at some kind of meeting or training session. For example, Jeannie explains that after meeting another teacher at an orientation session, "I took down the names and phone numbers, and when I got into a mild panic state before my first class met, I called Susan, and I said, 'Susan, what do you do in your classes,' and she told me about the various things that she used." Volunteers often report calling the director of their Council, who is usually a tutor as well, for help when they feel stuck.

And aides appear to be an important conduit for information-sharing. For example, Lisa, a teacher in a rural satellite site, explains that she and another teacher, "share aides, and that's another way we pass materials around. My aide also works with another teacher. Some of my aides are teachers in their own right, so they're always collecting materials and passing them around. It works both ways. Aides might bring in materials and say, 'Let's try this.'"

Relationships with other teachers sometimes begin as friendships, and sometimes the friendship develops from teaching together. Nan, for example, describes how she recruited a new teacher for her program: "I met her at the gym. We were tread-milling together and we started to talk about our work. I found out she had set up curriculum programs in a high security jail in Michigan. I said, 'Oh, do you ever do anything any more?' And that's how it got started." Lisa remembers that, "The other teacher here in the county I met her when I was selling Avon. She used to do ABE teaching in another state. When they needed a teacher here I recommended her for the job. We've substituted for each other, and we share an aide, so we send ideas back and forth." Ruth misses the friendship that she developed with another teacher: "I'd go again by myself [to conferences], but it was better with her. We traveled to and from work together. We were both new to teaching and we'd constantly talk about our students."

Some teachers would like to see opportunities to learn from other teachers more formalized. For example, an experienced teacher suggests:

> I'm wondering if there is some way we could do sort of like a master teachers program or something. I mean people who are "masterfully" doing the actual thing. And observe. I learned through observing and took that in, and if that were in some way a model - where you could see it being done, and then teaching - that would be great.

Some teachers with many years experience say they wish that their knowledge was utilized more to help other teachers; they feel that their knowledge is often overlooked, unacknowledged, and unused. This sentiment is also expressed by teachers who had participated in the VACIL (Virginia Cadre for Instructional Leadership) program, which used experienced teachers to work on instructional problems, come up with possible solutions, and write up their findings in the form of teacher tips.

Many teachers talk about the value of their work based on their own experiences with adult students and contrast this with their perceived low status as adult education teachers

working, predominantly, in a public school system. Teachers in the group interviews consistently use strong, positive language to discuss the satisfaction they get from teaching adults and their willingness to continue in the field. Many speak of the joy of teaching adults after spending a day with young children and dealing with the normal classroom management problems that go with public school education. They view their work with adults as important and very much appreciated by their students.

This belief shows up in the way several teachers describe how they know they are doing a good job. They speak of "seeing how my students feel about me," judging their competence based on how well students reacted to their teaching and personality, not so much on grade level improvement. For example, Roy enjoys teaching for "the reasons everybody else must tell you - how nice it is to work with people who are really motivated." In addition, he really likes how his knowledge is valued by his students. Things he often doesn't even think twice about are such important pieces of information to the people he's working with, and he feels good to have his own knowledge be so valued and important. Teachers comment:

> There's a real need out in southwest Virginia here, in this area, for Adult Education. And when you work with the students, it's so motivating. I tell my students, I come in tired at night, 7:00, after you've worked all day, but when you walk in the classroom, they rejuvenate you. [Molly]

> If you can get them to stretch in some way, perhaps they wouldn't have stretched if they hadn't come, I mean there are a lot of things that you can do and you can make a difference, but you might not see it right away. You might not ever see it. [Kate]

By contrast, there is much discussion about the teachers' belief that Adult Education is viewed as a marginal part of education in their local school district. They most often cite lack of benefits as evidence of this marginal status, and feel excluded from the culture of the school system, as Peg attests:

> I feel that we're really not part of the school system as a whole, which is something we've tried to address recently, the teachers have, but, for instance, in three classrooms we share one computer. I mean, that shows where our credibility is - and no printer. I

> tried to go up to the media center the other day to get something and they had moved and there was a sign that they won't be open until school's open in the fall, so - forget the computer. They won't be unpacked until September.

And the larger institutions that often host ABE programs, such as community colleges and public schools, commonly do not include ABE teachers in their staff meetings; Lisa attests: "We're adjunct faculty at the community college, [but] we're never invited to faculty meetings. I feel excluded. It's the same thing at the public school."

Administrators agree that working conditions are a problem. One administrator, Jordan, explains, "We expect teachers to do so much. STEPS, TABE, understand and teach curriculum, counseling,...register, and they have four hours a week....Time is a real constraint."

Participants report that cultural differences and, at times racial and social prejudice, are problems which interfere with communication between teachers and students. Cultural differences are an accepted, natural topic among ESL teachers, but ABE teachers usually need a specific question to prompt their discussion of this topic. Prejudice is viewing cultural, social or race differences as deficits and acting as if those persons from other ethnic, class, or racial groups were of lower status than oneself. Teachers and administrators in this sample do not usually talk about prejudice without a direct question but, when asked, will often recount personal experiences of observing, being the target of, or being asked to intervene in a situation involving discrimination and prejudice. They always feel it interferes with good teaching and learning.

Lack of knowledge and understanding about cultural differences interferes with communication between teachers and students and between teachers and other teachers. One African-American woman comments in an interview that class discrimination is particularly a problem; teachers treat students differently depending on "what side of the tracks they live on." Another teacher comments on the need for training that helps

teachers develop, "sensitivity to cultural differences. We have teachers who are well-meaning and who feel that they are doing what is right for the students, but sometimes what is - according to the American way - right for the student, does not translate in the cultural differences." And an ESL trainer comments, "Even if these people were born and reared inside the states, there are a lot of different cultures. You could do a cross-cultural workshop just on the subcultures that exist in the United States." Teachers report that class prejudice interferes with the JOBS program because some teachers think, "these people don't really want to work". Gale summarizes her observations about cultural differences and discrimination:

> It's not so obvious that there's a difference between some of the class levels or socio-economic levels or racial distinctions. I mean, I just don't think that a lot of people are aware yet, but I think it's coming, 'cause I think it's coming in the public schools where people are beginning to recognize differences in communication patterns and non-verbal behaviors are different, and then they'll say, "Oh yeah, that's why I thought that black kid was lazy. He's really not lazy at all. He's sending a different message than I'm receiving because I'm a white middle class woman."

## The Regional Level

**There are a number of resources available on a regional basis, including Cluster Training and other inservice workshops.** It is often most cost-effective to offer training on a regional basis; this provides opportunities for teachers in a region to get to know each other as well. Cluster Training is supported centrally, in Richmond, and is designed to respond to local requests for assistance. Teachers describe learning in Cluster Training from the presenters and from other teachers. Participants generally describe Cluster Training as interesting and practical, with good presenters and relevant topics. Vera describes a workshop she attended recently, "She put on a really good workshop that was something of value that we could use not only with adults at night, but I could even use it in the day." Gale agrees, as do many other teachers, that the workshop should directly relate to her teaching responsibilities: "When we present a staff development, we should make sure that

the presenter is one who can give us actual functioning tools, okay, things that we can take right out of that room and go to work with."

Teachers also describe learning from the opportunity to meet with other teachers and to travel with their colleagues. As one ABE teacher attests: "VAILL, inservice, are all good -- especially small discussions with Specialists and other teachers." Participants in Cluster Training workshops say they would like more formalized opportunities to get together with other teachers and observe other teachers teaching. They believe this will help them feel more able to try new ideas with their own students. Vera says, "I'd like to get with the other teachers sometime, the part-time people, and actually see some of -- hear some of the things that they're doing as opposed to the way I'm doing it, maybe." And Gale talks about watching another teacher: "Put me in her classroom and, you know, let me see what she's doing and let me know that it's okay that that this is not a traditional setting and I wouldn't be expected to be able to pull off this stuff, that we might in a very controlled classroom."

The chance to talk with other teachers working in jails and prisons is described as very important by members of this group. Teachers in these situations often consider their experiences slightly different from those of the "normal" ABE teacher. For example, jails often put limits on physical space and time available to ABE classes and usually have restrictions on certain types of materials such as spiral-bound notebooks and plastic rulers. In addition, teachers in jails must deal with an unusual degree of student turn-over. Because prisoners are often transferred without prior notice, it is difficult to make instructional plans. These teachers specifically mention workshops which were attended only by teachers working with the same populations. They report that they greatly benefitted from sharing coping strategies. Hazel says, "For me, working in a jail situation, the one [meeting] that's helped me the most was when we had one last year in Central Valley in which I got to talk with other people who were doing the same thing that I was doing."

The most frequent criticisms of Cluster training are comments about speakers who did not practice "good Adult Education" These comments dwell on speakers who did nothing but lecture and who treated their adult listeners (who were educators in their own right) like high school students. For example, Mona describes the relationship between how she wants to be treated in staff development and how she treats her students:

> I haven't been real satisfied with many of the Cluster Trainings because...we don't get to really participate in a lot of things....That, to me, is what a bad teacher is. And when I get myself into the routine of me - just like talk, talk, talk, talk, talk - and the students don't participate and do different things, it's just as bad as that.

And Tish describes another incident:

> One night we had this poor woman who had on sunglasses and the lady who was running the seminar that night...we are all adults, you know? And she stopped the thing in front of all of us doing this group, and she went over to this woman and she said, "I'm sorry, but why are you wearing sunglasses to my meeting?" You know? To adults. To adults. Educators. We're doing this. If I had been that woman...umph! But I thought she was very nice. She had some eye condition and she could not do the light. She did not mean it...this is not a teenager insulting anybody. This is an adult, and if an adult has on sunglasses at night in a meeting, probably there's a reason.

Our informants also criticize speakers who had little classroom experience with adult education, particularly when all of their examples came from elementary school. One ABE teacher describes his frustration: "By the end [of this workshop], I was a crazed person.... [She] didn't have any experience. I mean, I could have told a million better stories than she did and been more academically inclined than she was. I mean, saying things like about what colored pencil to use to grade --" Another member of his focus group interupts: "See, and to adult educators -- you see, these are people we don't need doing workshops." The teachers would like more of the presenters to be experienced adult education teachers:

> If we could get other adult teachers to come and share, just as we're doing now, and perhaps just come in and share their practical ideas, things that they've done, some of the tools that they use, I think that would be more beneficial than somebody just standing there who has not been in an adult situation in the last 20 years, but yet they read a book, read an article, and, you know, can just tell you what's going on. I think that would be beneficial to me. If she came in and told me about some of her

> experiences, I would respect that because she has been in the area for 20 years. But if you have just read articles and done research and haven't been in the classroom, I can't respect that. And I think that's what we're all crying for at this point, as far as staff development is concerned. And in a small group setting, as you say. [Olive]

Jordan, an administrator, is frustrated that trainers sometimes do not seem to understand the context they are walking into as well as the work of adult educators. He explains: "I want to tell trainers to come spend a day with me to get to know the reality here before they do training....They have to understand our reality and they have to really know what they're talking about -- they have to do it."

Sometimes a teacher interprets trainers' failure to involve the teachers as a statement about the value of the teachers' knowledge, like Lisa:

> Last year we were supposed to have one where everybody exchanges their ideas. Everyone would leave with a notebook of new ideas. But it never happened. The speaker got started talking and never stopped. We never got to exchanging, and some people had gone to a lot of trouble to bring their ideas. You know, to make copies of things. But I guess the speaker thought we were less important."

Teachers would like a greater role in planning Cluster Training. Teachers say they would like more input into deciding Cluster Training topics and schedules. Some teachers report that inservices are scheduled at inconvenient times, such as Saturday morning, and that they would like to be able to suggest better times. Roy sums up many of the comments we heard: "In our area, at least, I have yet to see anybody ask anybody what we want. They used to, and it really made a difference. When I had a say in the topics, I learned a lot more. It was relevant."

Examination of the documents we collected about Cluster Training show that it is organized on a traditional expert training model in which someone comes into a region to provide a one-shot workshop on a specific topic. Teachers may be questioned beforehand about their needs, but the concepts of needs and needs assessment are treated as nonproblematic in this process; it is assumed that there are needs for expert assistance, and

the needs assessment process is simply one of choosing from among a list of possibilities. Cluster training evaluation forms are designed to ascertain the extent to which participants enjoyed the workshop, rather than to help them reflect upon how it relates to broader teaching issues with which they are grappling.

Administrators describe teachers' needs in ways that are consistent with the traditional expert model of staff development. For example, Jordan says, "Teachers are constantly needing direction." At those programs in which there is ongoing staff development, these tend to follow the same pattern as the Cluster Training: a series of discrete workshops focusing on a range of topics related to classroom instruction.

Slightly more than half of the respondents to the survey (54%) indicate that they are aware of Cluster Training, and 69% of those who responded to a question about how helpful they find Cluster Training indicated a positive experience. Comments on the surveys are consistent with data from the focus group interviews; respondents say they want Cluster Training to be practical, but they also say they want training spread out over a period of time, and they want to be able to participate with other teachers in their programs to build a coordinated effort to change.

## The State Level

**Special projects funded from section 353 of the Adult Education Act, through the state staff in Virginia, provide resources for staff development on a state-wide basis.** These include the summer conferences (ABE and ESL VAILL conferences), the State newsletter Progress, and the Adult Education Resource Center located at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. These mechanisms operate with centralized support from the Adult Education staff in Richmond, but are relatively autonomous activities, with little planned relationship to the activities provided by Cluster Training. In general, teachers and

the few administrators with whom we spoke find these mechanisms useful, but they also have ideas for increasing their effectiveness.

Teachers consistently report the need to feel a part of the statewide community of Adult Education, to be connected to other teachers and administrators, to be kept informed about what is happening at the state level, and to receive guidance on philosophy and program direction.

In all of the focus group interviews participants talk about feeling a lack of security. This goes beyond wanting benefits and full-time contracts, although those items were mentioned often. In addition, however, many teachers speak compellingly of wanting to be more knowledgeable about what is happening at the state level. This is evident in the interest participants at VAILL showed in sessions up-dating the status of Adult Education within the Department of Education. At ESL VAILL, for example, one participant says that she can't understand why, "information was being disseminated to a small group which effects the entire population of teachers in ABE and I wondered why the information wasn't disseminated to the general assembly." She is describing a presentation by a state administrator in which the new structure of adult education was being reviewed. Many VAILL participants, teachers and administrators, tell us that,

> There is a need for more communication between the State Department of Ed. and what they expect us to do and the local education department through your public school board. There needs to be more input from them towards the particular learning situations, whether it's the literacy organization or ABE organization.

Many participants also talk about their desire for more philosophical leadership from the state level administrators. For example, one woman who has been teaching ABE for seven years says, "There needs to be more said -- what is it that you want of us? what is it that you need us to do for the people in the community?" and another woman, Jan, says,

"The state needs to give us some guidance, I think, on where we're going, on the philosophy."

The focus on community goes beyond a desire for information about the state administrative structure and philosophical leadership. The teachers with whom we spoke look to conferences such as VAILL for an opportunity to build their own community of colleagues -- other teachers or administrators who share their values, concerns, and experiences. Teachers consistently enjoy coming to VAILL for the chance to talk with other adult education teachers. Teachers from a single program frequently car pool to VAILL so they can talk on the way. Teachers also report that they look forward to meeting up with old friends at VAILL and asking about their classes in the past year. During interviews with participants at VAILL, several times we talked with two or more teachers who were attending workshops together and discussing them together afterward. As Jan attests, "That's, I think, the...most important achievement of this VAILL...to build a sense of community in sharing that we're all in this together."

ESL VAILL formalized a mechanism for teachers getting together to talk to each other about specific topics. They were called focus groups and described as times for conference participants to "meet informally with your colleagues to discuss topics of mutual interest. Each group is led by a facilitator who is knowledgeable and experienced in the topic area." Even though the topics were pre-chosen, there were only six groups, and they only met for one hour, these groups clearly responded to teachers' desires. At the ABE VAILL, however, there are no such formalized times and breaks and other free times are used by participants to share and create networks. One ABE VAILL participant explains,

> That's what made me really angry at the last conference that we had, when they were saying that they were thinking of cutting free-time out because the teachers were just socializing. I never missed any of the workshops that they offered, but I met a lot of people, and you sort of have to make your own network, it's not formed for you. And that's the best way to do it.

Many teachers express a limit to their desire for closeness, however, As Gale says, "Sometimes it's better to be off by yourself a little bit because then you can go the way you want to go."

Administrators also express their desire to be part of a statewide community. They have more opportunities to participate in mechanisms such as advisory committees for statewide projects. Bruce, an administrator, uses service to the state as an opportunity for his own continuing learning; he participated in a statewide advisory committee and he says,

> It's important to take those kinds of opportunities -- it's useful. You see that people in most jurisdictions are having the same problems you are, so you see it's not just a question of your own lack of competence. There's some incompetence, but you feel better to see we all have the same problems, so maybe we can work together to solve them.

The statewide newsletter Progress fulfills some of the functions of providing information that helps teachers and administrators feel part of a larger system. Each issue leads off with an article about a topic of major concern to the system, such as professional development, accountability, collaboration, and reorganization. The articles are written with a minimum of technical jargon and some of the other articles in each issue usually are related to the lead article.

However, at least two thirds of all interview informants are either unaware of the newsletter, or know about it but rarely see it. Forty-seven percent of those teachers or volunteers who responded to the survey said they received the newsletter; 27% of those rated it as very or somewhat helpful, while 48% percent rated it neutrally. Many teachers say that they thought the newsletter came to the administrator of their program, but that there never was a copy made available to them. Teachers report that they see Progress as having useful information; they want to be kept current on state-level issues. However, they do not consider it staff development because it deals with administrative rather than

instructional issues. As one teacher, Molly, explains, "Progress is not staff development....There's nothing in here that would help me go into a classroom and help me be a better teacher or give me new ideas."

Teachers familiar with the newsletter report that the information in Progress seems to travel from the state to the field, but that there is no opportunity for information from the field. They feel that the newsletter content is state-directed, not teacher-directed. This can feel alienating, as Jan describes, "There's the good old boys in the state, and I feel they're just talking to each other in that newsletter." And some teachers, like Roy, simply feel it isn't written for them: "It's really for supervisors."

Survey respondents as well as a majority of teachers interviewed want a newsletter which includes teacher tips and articles by teachers across the state; Mona explains:

> It's not exciting. I think more people would probably make better use of it if there were some more practical things in there. It's good to have information about what's going on with the state and all, but then some of the other concrete things I can get a handle on are also helpful.

At the same time, many teachers agree with Sally's sentiment -- they want to continue Progress, but add something: "I'm really interested in state level and local level as far as just putting together how we're organized. But I would like practical things too.

Many teachers express a desire to be part of a more coherent system, and for their own learning to be part of a coherent plan. Teachers and administrators want to see how local, regional, and state programs fit together. This goes beyond simply knowing what is happening administratively on different levels, to a need for a state-wide "community" of adult educators that includes people at all levels in the system and a sense of shared goals, philosophy and values. In addition, teachers talk about wanting follow-up sessions that help them apply what they learn at VAILL and other workshops, with support.

The teachers with whom we talked at VAILL say they would benefit from a coherent staff development program which incorporates elements discussed elsewhere such as collaborating with other teachers, doing a few topics in greater depth, studying a topic over time, or planning a series of meetings around a topic; they want some connectedness. One of the people involved with planning VAILL puts it this way:

> I think the VAILL conference - the idea is to present general ideas, general directions to use as a key catalyst. The Cluster Training, as I understood it to be, should be keyed off of the main points, or whatever the main points are going to be for that year, which can set up the training areas. That those are the areas that should be reinforced in regional workshops through Cluster Training.

And Roy makes this point:

> It would be nice to go to something at one of these conferences to help you make it all coherent. Adult education seems to be such a mishmash. In the assessment session the state asks for one thing; it's not the same thing that we do in my classroom; it's not the same thing that the students want to know about how they're doing. It all seems so incoherent, and some of the things just don't fit together at all. It would be nice if there could be some session, maybe a general session, where you get some understanding of how everything fits together. Some understanding of what the state's expectations are, and how that fits in with the county expectations and how that fits in with my students' expectations, and some way of understanding how the philosophy behind doing it this way has something to do with the philosophy of doing it some other way. Just something to help me have some framework to see how things all fit together - the administrative things I'm asked to do, the ways I teach, the things that my students want to learn. I could really use help making it all coherent somehow.

VAILL participants want help structuring other activities during the year to help them continue learning, using VAILL as a catalyst for generating new ideas. They ask for follow-up workshops during the year to meet with fellow participants to discuss implementation of new ideas. There are also requests for more workshops on the same topic as a particular VAILL session, scheduled a few months into the fall, to get participants of the VAILL session together to discuss their success or problems with implementing what they had learned, as Sally explains:

> One thing I wish we had was more of a follow-up kind of thing - like we went to some really good stuff at George Mason...and there was a lot of good stuff, but I really needed to have - like a month or two later - a meeting where you say, "Well now, what did you try? How did it go?" and that would get me going better, I think.

And Peg, a teacher for six years, states, "It would be helpful to do a practicum or something, when you get into a classroom setting, to try it out.

Teachers say that they would like to get enough information about a new idea to begin working with it at VAILL, and then additional workshops during the year to get more information. They express a need to work with a new idea and then to be able to ask more questions as they become more familiar with the concept. A woman who has been volunteering for three years explains that, "The first time [at an inservice] I didn't know which question to ask." And Vera requests, "Cooperative learning for example. Don't give me an hour. True cooperative learning is a real science, you know? I don't need an hour of "put them in groups and go." Give me two or three sessions and let me really understand the theory of it and how it works."

The more experienced teachers who have taken advantage of many opportunities for staff development feel they need to experiment with a new idea, in order to make it work in their class. Teachers in several focus groups say they found some new ideas presented at inservices and summer training institutes to be interesting, but that they have to "play" with the ideas some to make them work in their situation. A teacher with 15 years of experience summarizes these sentiments: "I would like to see something that helped people examine how they will use this when they get home - help them make a plan or something."

The activities that teachers find useful at VAILL reflect the teachers' experience teaching and attending conferences and workshops, and the teachers' specific programmatic situation. Almost everyone enjoys looking at the publishers' displays and updating their

knowledge of commercially available materials. A few teachers even say they consider the displays the main attraction at VAILL and especially like the samples they go home with. They report that they are looking for new workbooks which provide instruction and practice using adult-oriented contexts and illustrations.

New teachers report that they feel better prepared to teach after attending the strand at VAILL designed especially for new teachers. They find being with other new teachers who have the same dilemmas and problems to be very helpful. They talk about feeling relieved that other people had the same questions. Mona explains:

> There were teachers in there who were preparing to start fall classes, and the questions that they asked and the things that concerned them and bothered them were things that I remembered thinking, "How am I going to get through this? Now where am I supposed to put that? Now where do I write this down?" Or, "Am I going to have to keep this? Am I going to have to be accountable for this?" And I know that that facet of Adult Ed is changing constantly. But the things and the methods that they handed me, I felt, were more teacher oriented. [Mona]

Many teachers say they liked the strand structure at previous VAILL conferences. They say they find an indepth treatment of content matter to be helpful and inspiring. They report that they had a better grasp of abstract ideas and more tools for trying new ideas out back at home. Roy states, "The strand idea really got you into it a lot more. And that was the time I learned the most." On the other hand, some teachers at VAILL tell us that they do not like the strands and prefer a larger number of shorter sessions on a broader variety of topics. One new teacher says, "I don't want to go to the long sessions for new teachers. I want to sample a lot of different things, not spend all my time in one session, with one presenter."

Experienced teachers in particular report finding little new to challenge them and to help them improve their practice. Many experienced teachers feel that VAILL offers the same topics presented by the same speakers, over and over again. These teachers are not complaining about the quality of the workshops they had attended, but are saying that now

that they have a basic knowledge, they want more depth. They feel that most of the workshops offered at VAILL are great for the first few years, but after that, they become stale. Jan, an experienced teacher who has attended many VAILL conferences, puts it this way:

> I would like to see VAILL pay attention to the fact that you have returning teachers. We need another level of information so that we're not going to go to her [popular workshop leader's] third presentation of the same material....I'd like to see a more developmental approach to those trainings, so that people can grow through them.

Many experienced participants feel that they are learning nothing new, yet still have unanswered questions, like this experienced teacher:

> Well, let me mention LD, for example. That's long been one of my problems too, and I've been to enough of the VAILL and the things that had LD that I can recognize them now. But I still feel the need of knowing better tricks, so to speak, to help those LD students because if you're in it long enough, you're bound to get some.

Tutors and teachers often present themselves as actively sorting through, assessing, adapting, or rejecting new ideas gleaned from conference presentations and other sources. This process is valued in and of itself. For example, one volunteer wrote on a survey form:

> I try [a new idea] if I feel it will benefit my class. Otherwise I take ideas from it and adapt it. Whether I use it or not, they are helpful because they made you re-evaluate what you are doing and why and could this new technique make it better for students. [It] opens eyes to new approaches and techniques.

Both new and experienced teachers want presenters who are knowledgeable and experienced in classrooms with adults and who use sound adult learning theory in the way they structure their presentations; this is similar to our finding about Cluster Training. Teachers want information that is practical and can be applied to their own situations. Teachers with more experience are more likely to say that they also are interested in understanding why something works, but everyone we spoke with would agree with the sentiments of this volunteer, Larry: "We aren't interested in going to somewhere where somebody just spouts off theory."

Experienced teachers who are searching for more advanced information about particular topics report having difficulty choosing among various workshops offered on a particular topic at VAILL. For example, several workshops, lead by different speakers, were listed on the VAILL schedule on the topic of Learning Disabilities. The teachers who talk about this do not feel there is enough information provided to help them decide if any one session will deal with more advanced information. Or, in another area, Alice explains,

> I went to a great session last year on whole language. This time there was a session on whole language, but I didn't go to it. I didn't know if it would be different. I didn't know if it was a person who was really recognized in his field, and knew what he was talking about. I didn't want to waste my time.

One attempt in the past to provide ongoing attention to learning and follow-up to VAILL is consistent with an inquiry approach to staff development -- there was an Action Research project begun at a previous VAILL. There were five teachers in the focus group interviews who had participated in this project, which involved a group of teachers working on individual research projects in their classrooms throughout the year. They met and shared problems and insights several times during the year and kept research journals. They all are very enthusiastic about their experience and use strong, positive language to describe it. Cathy explains,

> It started there at that summer workshop, but then it went on through the fall, through the year. It was an Action Research class, and we met in Richmond. There were 16 of us across the state, and we actually had to keep a diary of what was going on in our classes and, you know, we met and we exchanged...I found that very valuable as far as the interaction with other teachers that were doing similar things.

Administrators' satisfaction with VAILL also appears to reflect their experience and situation; they would like more sessions geared to their needs. For example, Jordan, an administrator in an urban area says:

> I like VAILL. It sets the climate for the next fiscal period. You find out you're dealing with the same problems as others are. I have found the administrators sessions not well done -- administrators need management skills too....There's not enough for

> administrators at these conferences. We need help understanding the mission and how to help the teachers in relation to that mission.

Chuck, an administrator in a volunteer literacy organization, appreciates that, "It's only in the last few years that [VAILL is] including volunteer organizations. Now they're offering things for volunteer administrators -- that's moving in the right direction." And Bruce, an administrator in a rural area, says:

> I go for the networking. It's almost more important than the workshops. You see folks you may talk to on the phone -- or never met before. I like the social aspects. The keynote speech, there's usually a speech that get's you to think about something. The workshops -- In 3 years I can still find different ones. At first, on one level, you want almost a cookbook, but after a while you see that doesn't seem to happen. You get a little more laid back about it.

Satisfaction with the Resource Center appears to reflect teachers' geographic location, area of teaching, resources available at their sites, and their years of experience. Seventy-four percent of the teachers who respond to the survey say that they are aware of the resource center. These tend to be teachers with higher numbers of students, so our hunch is that these are most often ABE teachers rather than volunteers. We find that teachers who live relatively close to the Resource Center and can personally visit it tend to see it as useful. Teachers who are able to drive to the Resource Center report positive experiences with the Center. They say they go one or more times a year and are able to find materials which are helpful in their lesson planning. Kelly attests,

> It has worlds of material. And it's worth your while. As a matter of fact, one of the neat inservice training we had once was all of our teachers went on a little bus, or a van, or something, and we went to the Resource Center and spent hours browsing and talking with the Director, and it was a neat experience.

However, teachers we spoke with who live far from Richmond and must rely on telephone communications with the Resource Center are much less satisfied with the service. Respondents say whether or not they received satisfactory answers to their questions depended upon who answered the telephone when they called. Teachers in interviews as well as on the surveys feel that although the workers in the Center are always

"polite," they are not knowledgeable about the field of adult education or about the materials in the Resource Center and could not answer simple questions. Wanda explains:

> It depends upon who I talk to. Now, I requested some materials for a gentleman taking his test for his driver's license for trucks. The first time I called, they said, "No, we don't have anything." I called back a few days later, talked to someone else and they said, "Oh, yeah, we have this, and this, and this." You know, it's like anything else. It's who you talk to.

And Cathy describes her experience: "Every time I've called them for information, they don't have it, they don't know what I'm talking about, or it's just, you know, they'll say, 'Well, I'll call somebody else and we'll get back to you,' and I never hear from them again."

Several teachers mention that they found trips to the Center very helpful when they were first starting out as teachers, but they do not use it much now that they know of other resources. Those resources include other teachers, their own experiences, their students, publishers, VAILL conferences, and Cluster workshops. Jo, for example, says, "The beginning for me, [the Resource Center] was a really important, like, anchoring thing. I knew I could go there and look and see what was available and get a sense of the range of materials." However, Jordan, an administrator who has taken groups of teachers to visit the Resource Center, cautions, "The resource center is extremely useful...[but] accessibility is not so good -- parking is difficult. The resource center may have to visit centers and display their materials on a continuous basis because not everyone can get there."

Some programs have developed their own resource libraries; teachers at these programs say that they do not use the Resource Center in Richmond because it is less convenient than their resource library nearby. For example, a teacher who works out of an urban learning center says, "The lead teachers have a resource file on each site, and that's very helpful." Some volunteer groups maintain a collection for their tutors to use. One volunteer reports: "I go upstairs in the library to the Literacy Council room and there's a lot of resources there which are really helpful. And then our county library has a section of

books and tapes - a literacy collection, you know, on low vocabulary and high interest. They're wonderful!"

ESL teachers in our interviews report finding that the Resource Center in Richmond has too little material on ESL to be of use to them. It should be noted that the teachers who make this comment visited the Richmond Center several years ago and have not gone back since, to check on the current collection. These teachers began their own local collection of ESL materials.

## Conclusion

Literacy educators in Virginia take advantage of opportunities to learn at the local, regional and state levels. Although their motivation is varied, as are local situations and resources, their commitment to adult literacy education is without question. Most teachers and administrators who participated in the survey and interviews are excited about their work and appreciate the learning opportunities provided by the staff development activities we examined. Almost everyone we spoke with was eager to share their experiences and opinions with us. The focus group participants were particularly helpful and enthusiastic. The practitioners' enthusiasm and the commitment made by the Commonwealth of Virginia provide the groundwork for an exciting transition to a staff development system that can enhance services and learning for everyone involved.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

At this point we have to stand back and ask what insights we have developed about the effectiveness of ABE staff development in Virginia from the perspectives shared by all of the volunteers, teachers, administrators, state staff and others through interviews and questionnaires. Therefore, in this chapter we use the conceptual framework in Chapter 1 to help develop a set of conclusions and recommendations. We present our major conclusions in the first section of this chapter; our recommendations, including suggestions for ongoing evaluation, are in the final sections.

### Conclusions

The ABE teachers, administrators and volunteers who participated in this study are diverse; some are excited about their own learning, continually asking questions about their practice and creatively using resources to investigate their questions. As they participate in workshops or other events, these teachers compare the ideas being presented with their understanding of what they need to know and what is relevant to their situations. When there seems to be a good match, they consider the workshop practical or interesting, and they develop a plan for applying, testing, revising, adapting and using some of the ideas and information. This plan usually is not formalized -- it is often simply a process of trying something new, talking with colleagues, and observing students. These teachers often are trying to *understand* something more deeply, rather than simply to *behave* in new ways.

Other teachers participate in workshops and conferences looking for tips and tools to bring back to their classrooms; they are trying to fine-tune their work, but not to question overall paradigms and underlying assumptions. Their emphasis is on trying new behaviors rather than developing new insights. Still other teachers are content to use what

they know from their professional and personal experience; they are not interested in what staff development may have to offer.

Evaluation of the state level staff development mechanisms must take into account this range of teachers' characteristics as well as the range of situations in which teachers work. We find, therefore, that these activities cannot be viewed discretely; the extent to which any one activity is useful depends upon the teacher's characteristics and how the teacher connects it to his or her situation and ways of learning. A staff development program administered from the state level must provide opportunities for teachers who are at many places along this broad continuum of orientations to learning. It also must reflect our understanding that change is slow and incremental.

As we analyzed the data and realized that teachers were placing participation in staff development activities in the framework of the ways they construct their own learning, we searched for a theoretical model that would help us present these ideas coherently. Inquiry-based staff development incorporates the ideas and experiences shared by Virginia's literacy practitioners in this study. It also is consistent with Virginia's commitment to responsive adult education. It is important to develop policy statements about both student instruction and staff development concurrently, because they support each other.

We propose a model of staff development centered on the teacher's questions in relation to practice. This changes the relationship between teachers and experts. Therefore, rather than place the staff development mechanisms at the center of the learning process, we place the teacher at the center (see Figure 1). We see the teacher embedded in a range of contexts that move from his or her personal life to the classroom, the program, the region, and the state system (see Figure 2). Within each context are a set of relationships to other persons, to other resources and to his or her own knowledge. Each context has a set of norms, beliefs and attitudes about the role of teachers' knowledge that influence the kind of

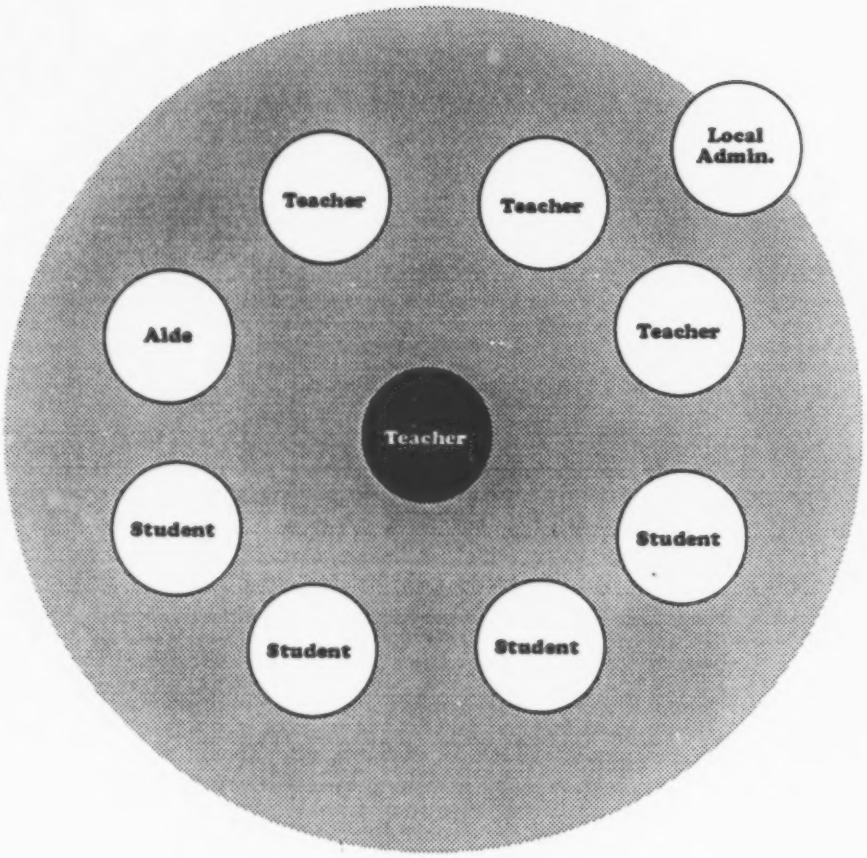


Figure 1
The Teacher Environment

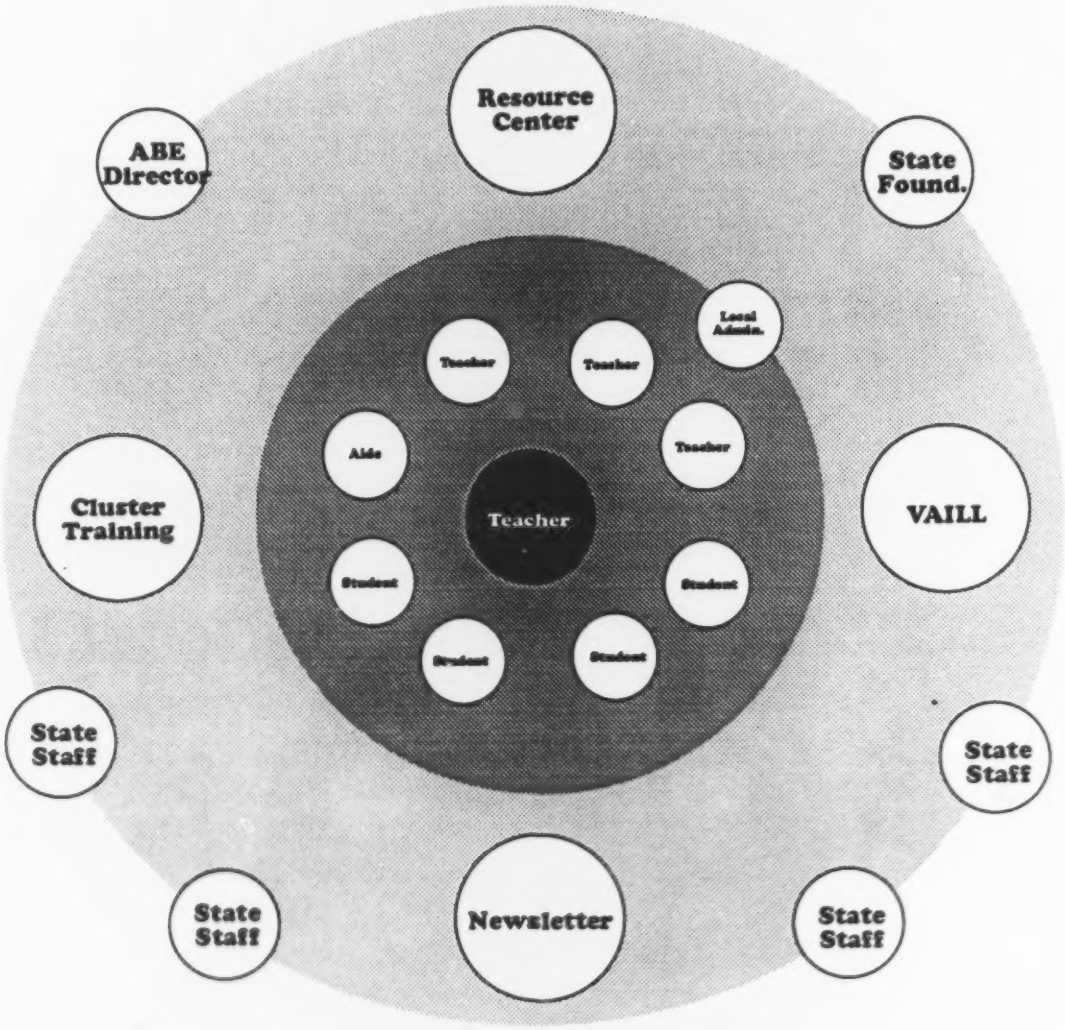


Figure 2

Teacher and State Environment

support teachers experience for their own continuing learning and growth. The culture of the program may place particular values on trying new approaches to teaching, for example, or on working with other teachers to develop curriculum collaboratively. Staff development must address this culture rather than simply the beliefs and practices of individuals. Therefore, it is essential to involve administrators, specialists, regional planners, state level staff -- everyone, at all levels, who has an impact on the attitudes and values that shape the environments in which teachers are learning. As Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1991) state, "Instead of beginning with specific practices, staff development programs can begin with teachers' thinking about their own work, as well as aim to reshape work environments to enable reflective and collaborative dialog and to give teachers power to act on their conclusions" (p. 13). There is still an important role for expert knowledge in this model; teachers, however, are now counted among the experts.

The staff development mechanisms that are the focus of this study are at the state level, but we can understand the effectiveness of each mechanism only in relation to teachers' ability to take the ideas, information and experiences "back home" -- to the inner circles of their programs, their classrooms, and their interactions with other teachers, students and their own knowledge. Development of a staff development *system*, therefore, has to do with creating relationships *among* the delivery structures and *across* contexts, while remaining respectful of the authority of teachers' knowledge (see Figure 3). It must address the importance of community as well as support continuing skill and knowledge development.

These findings also illuminate the importance of connecting staff development and program development. We claim that learning is fundamentally tied to the teachers' situation; however, administrators as well as teachers continue to view ABE staff development as a process of individual change, separated from larger programmatic issues. But developing a staff development system cannot be separated from improving working

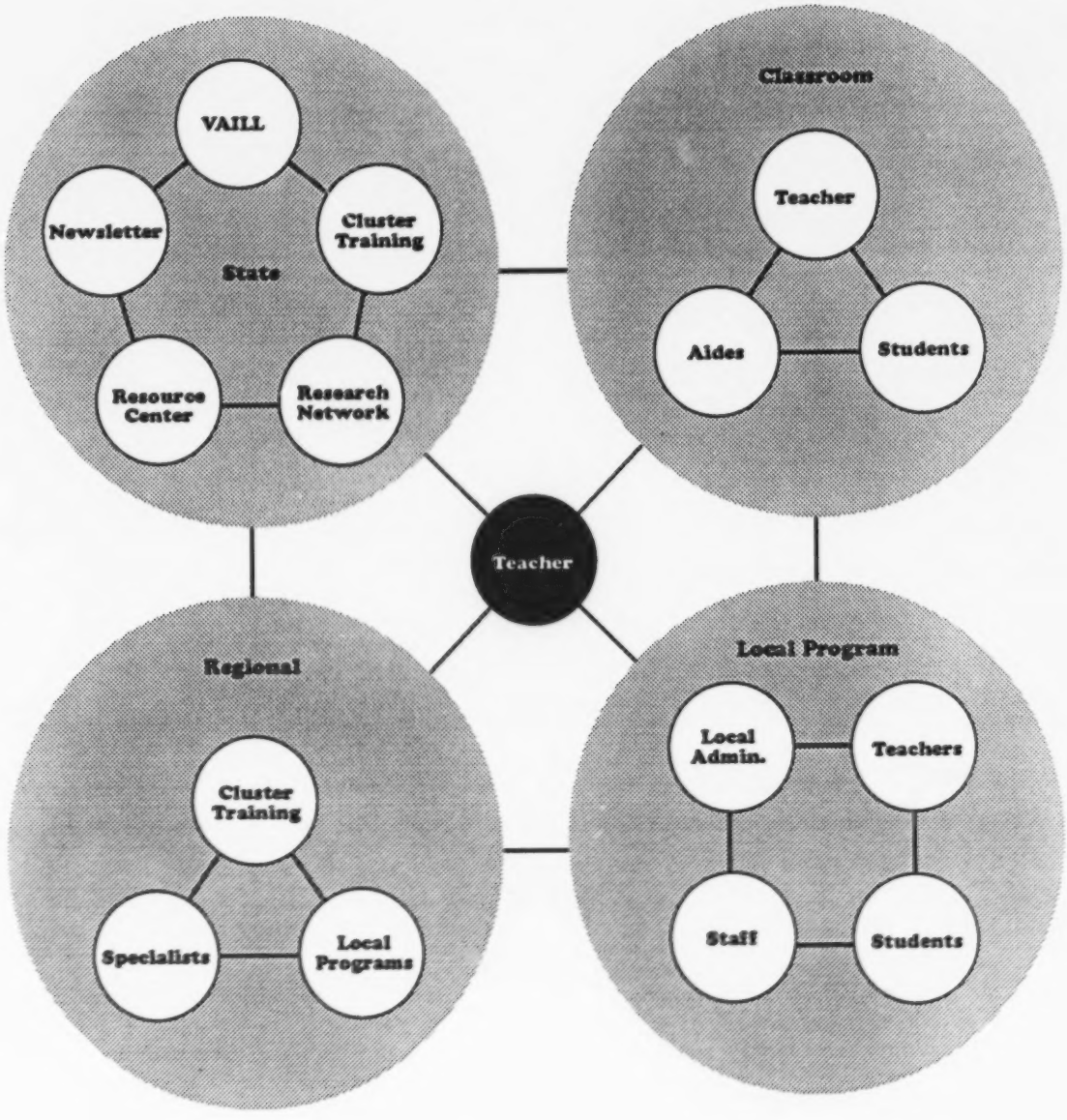


Figure 3

Staff Development System

conditions, providing opportunities for teachers to come together to work with administrators on program-related issues, and developing a culture of learning and respect for the role of teachers' knowledge. The present emphasis on the individual teacher should not be lost, as Lieberman and Miller (1991) remind us,

> Teaching is a craft. No matter how school cultures are transformed, the individual teacher continues to make and remake the classroom, based on his or her own imagination, spirit, inspiration, and learning. Staff development programs must maintain a fragile balance between building cultures where collaboration and colleagueship are promoted and where individual integrity and artistry are allowed to flourish. (p. 108)

However, it is important to integrate a commitment to individual teacher growth and development with an understanding of the importance of community, program growth, collaborative work and shared learning. Griffin's (1991) model of "interactive staff development" is useful here. He describes the interactive nature of learning, and its relationship to a dynamic context:

> Interactive staff development would capitalize on and provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn from one another and learn together. Learning from one another makes sense in that what is most deeply known about teaching is known by teachers; a way for that knowledge to infuse groups of teachers must be devised. But learning together is a different concept. Of course, in most inservice education programs, teachers are expected to learn together, but the knowledge is determined not by teachers but by school system officers. Interactive staff development, using the assumptions about the power of teacher-teacher interaction, would focus opportunities for learning together on becoming expert about those issues that the teacher group itself deems of most future or current worth. (p. 250)

The staff development mechanisms that are available at the state level for ABE and volunteer adult literacy instructors in Virginia provide an important foundation for a staff development system that is based on an inquiry model, values teachers' knowledge and supports continuing program improvement as well as individual teacher change. In the following section we offer specific recommendations intended to build on that foundation to create a system that serves teachers and students, over a period of time.

## Recommendations

In good adult education practice, teachers respect students' knowledge and ability to learn. Similarly, the directors of Cluster Training, the Resource Center, VAILL and Progress -- who we refer to as the Staff Development Team -- should respect teachers as creators of knowledge. The recommendations that follow assume a commitment to developing a coherent shared philosophy of staff development in which respect for teachers' knowledge is a central tenet. The recommendations are based on our findings and are guided by our understanding of an inquiry model of staff development in which teachers are at the center.

### A Staff Development System

All of the staff development activities we examined during this study -- VAILL, the Resource Center, Cluster Training and Progress -- are presently playing a positive role in the professional development of adult education teachers in the state. They provide many of the pieces needed for a staff development system. However, we recommend refocusing these activities consistent with an inquiry-based staff development model. We recommend that all staff development activities are conducted in ways consistent with the following premises:

Teachers' knowledge is valued.

Teachers are helped to use what they know to continue learning.

Activities, attitudes, structures and values support building a community of teachers as well as a community of teachers and learners.

There is a focus on program improvement as well as individual change. This means that the inter-relatedness of effective management techniques, student retention, student achievement, improved teaching techniques, teacher satisfaction, improved status for adult education, and staff development is stressed throughout all aspects of adult education, including the planning of staff development.

Staff development is viewed as a continuing process involving administrators as well as teachers.

These premises imply that the Staff Development Team begins by working towards adopting a shared view of staff development, a coherent theoretical and philosophical view of literacy education as well as staff development, and coordinating their efforts towards common ends. The Staff Development Team should meet together regularly, seeing themselves as an interactive team, directing their own programs but still collaborating with each other.

The Staff Development Team should engage in a planning process that addresses movement toward a staff development system based in an inquiry-based model over the next five years. Teachers need an opportunity to examine the ways in which they may have internalized some of the assumptions and judgements associated with their low status in the larger field of education and, often, in their own institutions. The National Writing Project begins the change process by inviting teachers to attend intensive training institutes to engage in critical self-examination and sharing of their knowledge with others. The institutes create a cadre of trained professionals who understand the philosophy and are personally committed to its implementation in their own practice. At the same time, these teachers are supported by ongoing workshops, newsletters and other opportunities for continuing contact. The Virginia State Office of Adult Education can begin creating a staff development system by providing similar kinds of opportunities -- workshops for selected teachers who are interested in an inquiry orientation to staff development. These communities of teachers will be supported in their program settings on a continuing basis, perhaps through the specialists and working with their administrators. Each year additional groups of teachers can be invited to participate, and the teachers from previous years can move into leadership roles in relation to new teachers in the system.

Other resources need to be provided at the same time for teachers who are still oriented to the more traditional expert model of staff development. Workshops at VAILL,

Cluster Training workshops, newsletter articles and new Resource Center staffing all can support a learner-centered view of literacy education and an inquiry model of staff development while helping teachers and administrators improve their practice in concrete, specific ways. For example, dialog groups at VAILL can provide opportunities for teachers to examine their experience and share their knowledge, and newsletter articles about teaching can be written in ways that help teachers ask questions about their own work.

It is important to develop a clear policy about the nature of good adult literacy education practice concurrently with this approach to staff development. An inquiry model is interactive -- teachers' knowledge is respected and is placed in a relationship with other sources of knowledge, including academic knowledge and policy. The state is responsible for helping teachers ask critical questions and for helping to create an environment in which those questions can be explored. Although staff hiring and administrative policies are local prerogatives, the state can create an incentive structure that rewards particular practices over others.

We offer the following suggestions for the next year:

* Hire a staff development coordinator.

* Re-draft the job descriptions of the directors of staff development activities to emphasize the collaborative nature of the system.

* Include the director of the Research Network in this group since the practitioner/researcher aspect of that program is essentially inquiry based staff development.

* Initiate a planning process that addresses the philosophy of literacy education, improved working conditions, enhanced status, and philosophy of staff development.

* Develop training for administrators and Specialists so that they can support teachers who want to participate in a more inquiry-based approach to their own learning.

Local and Regional Staff Development: Cluster Training

At its conception, the Cluster Training program was focused around small groups (clusters) of teachers gathering to discuss their training needs and applying to the Cluster Training director to help them organize a workshop based on those needs. The process was initiated by teachers and controlled by them to a limited extent in that teachers chose the topics they felt they needed. We encourage a return to this process, but with workshops as only one of a number of possible staff development activities, and with an emphasis on placing Cluster Training activities in relation to teachers' learning agendas. In addition to workshops, Cluster Training can:

* Promote dialog groups (See Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990) for teachers and for administrators which would serve as vehicles for individual and group reflection and development of learning projects that are oriented to program as well as individual issues.

* Provide Cluster Training funds on a pro-rated basis to each planning district (based on number of teachers, with a travel/distance factor built in) to be spent on learning projects.

* Continue to help link teachers with other resources, including speakers, appropriate conferences, etc. as they plan their projects, but the emphasis on developing workshop packages would shift to an emphasis on creating opportunities for teachers to come together to share their knowledge and questions.

* Promote community-building components such as peer coaching and observation, mentoring, dialog journals and regular learning group meetings.

The Cluster Training office can provide a small number of institutes in the first year for teachers who want to learn about inquiry-based staff development. These will provide an opportunity for teachers to explore their feelings about their practice, how they learn, what their questions are, and the relationship between their classroom practice and the larger program environment. Cluster Training would make a commitment to continuing support of the projects and the community that begins to develop in these institutes, working with Specialists, administrators and other appropriate personnel. This work will be supervised by the state Staff Development Director. To support this agenda, the Cluster Training office also should:

* Provide training for Specialists, administrators and/or regional program planners so they can help teachers think through their learning project plans and provide information about available resources and linkages to others with similar interests.

* Develop plans in planning districts which address the contribution of individual and small group projects to the larger program and district development agenda.

Administrator/Program Planner Staff Development

We find that administrators play a crucial role in staff development for teachers; they provide access to resources as well as creating a climate that inhibits or enhances learning and change. Administrators need help understanding staff development, learning and learner-centered adult literacy education. We recommend that the inquiry-based model be developed to address administrators' learning needs as well as teachers. We further recommend that in the first year the state:

* Encourage administrators and program planners to pursue their own learning projects alongside their teachers.

* Encourage administrators and program planners to support teacher learning projects which look at program-wide issues such as student recruitment. An administrator and teacher could team up to collaborate on such a project.

* Provide administrator training on the facilitation of teacher learning at VAILL or through Cluster Training.

* Encourage teachers and administrators to meet together to discuss their learning projects and program-wide issues. Some of the Evaluative Staff Meetings presently conducted by Specialists provide an excellent opportunity for communication between staff members and can be used as a model for this type of meeting.

Specialist Staff Development

Many part time administrators and full time program planners are too busy to provide the individualized kind of help many teachers will need to participate in inquiry based staff development. With staff development a major part of their job description, Specialists are in a good position to provide this assistance. We suggest the following to prepare them for this role:

* Encourage Specialists to pursue their own learning projects each year and to share their learning as a group, paying particular attention to the process of conducting a learning project that is based in their own practice.

* Provide in-depth training in the facilitation of teacher learning, drawing on experts in the field and relating these skills to what they have learned from their experience with the process.

State Level Staff Development Mechanisms

VAILL. The summer conferences provide an excellent opportunity for community-building among teachers and administrators. They provide time and space for practitioners to come together to share ideas, learning projects and concerns. Each conference should be used by state staff as a time to "meet the people" and communicate policy developments, funding news and current issues in adult education. Teachers and administrators in the field have attested to the value of this type of information -- it assures them that they are not marginal, that they belong to a group of concerned professionals and that the state staff in Richmond is interested in what they have to say. At the same time, VAILL is an opportunity for the state to communicate its view of good adult literacy education practice through the choice of presenters, topics and workshop formats. Finally, VAILL should communicate the state's value of teachers' knowledge through the roles teachers play at all stages in the development and conduct of VAILL.

This year's VAILL conferences are already planned and much of the planning for next year's is already underway. We make the following recommendations so that they can be integrated as much as possible into the processes already in motion as well as used to inform planning that is yet to take place:

* Increase the role of teachers in planning VAILL. Teachers should participate strongly on the VAILL advisory committee(s).

* Identify substantial blocks of time at VAILL for informal sharing among teachers and among administrators, as well as for facilitated dialog groups.

* Schedule times for teachers to share the results of their learning projects with each other at VAILL.

Some of the existing state-directed staff development activities are useful and appropriate, such as the established content of the strand for new teachers at VAILL. The VAILL conferences provide a good place for teachers to hear speakers who bring fresh ideas and insights about the field. We recognize that teachers need to go beyond themselves to grow and many times they are unaware of current issues in adult education. Teachers can benefit from hearing speakers from a variety of disciplines. We suggest the following procedures:

* Special presentations should be followed by small group discussions to explore how teachers relate the presentations to their own knowledge, experience and questions. These discussions should be led by facilitators who understand the process of teacher inquiry. These discussions should lead toward teachers planning for their next steps in sharing new ideas with colleagues at their programs and trying new practices with their students.

* Teachers should have the opportunity at the end of VAILL to develop plans for using resources such as Cluster Training, in-service workshops, teacher dialog groups, state meetings and peer observation to support continued learning and exploration of ideas which they develop at VAILL.

The Resource Center. An up-to-date, responsive Resource Center is an important part of inquiry based staff development. Particularly for part-time staff who do not have the money to buy resource materials or the time to search for them at distant libraries, a resource center is an invaluable aid for self-directed teacher/learners.

The materials in the Resource Center need to be easy to find and use. This means that the staff must be knowledgeable about adult education topics and able to help teachers,

whether the teachers visit personally or call. We recommend the following procedures to improve the ability of the Resource Center to respond to requests for information:

* Help staff members to view themselves as part of a service organization, playing an important role in the larger collaborative effort.

* Hire part-time workers who are familiar with adult education issues to provide information over the phone. These could be adult education graduate students who are on work-study grants, or it could be practitioners.

* Thoroughly train these workers in the organization of materials at the Center and the procedure for borrowing them.

* Form an advisory committee made up largely of teachers and administrators. This committee should have two working groups -- one which helps make decisions regarding new acquisitions and another which oversees the training of staff, providing feedback from the field.

* Coordinate with Cluster Training and VAILL to provide resource material support for inquiry projects and to have Cluster Training and VAILL provide support for the use of teacher-generated resource materials available through the Resource Center.

* Continue the program which pays teachers to review materials.

We recommend that the materials in the Center:

* Be as current and as complete as possible.

* Put greater emphasis on teacher enrichment materials and reference books than at present.

* Emphasize teacher created materials, especially those resulting from learning projects, making teachers aware of this information and keeping them easily available.

There are a variety of possible delivery models for a Resource Center. Many of the suggestions listed above are applicable across different models. The Resource Center now is operated as a centralized facility located at Virginia Commonwealth University. While there may be historical reasons for placing the Resource Center at a university, an alternative centralized model could place it in a Learning Center. In such a setting it may be easier to find employees who have a practical working knowledge of adult education issues. A part-time teacher at such a Learning Center/Resource Center could also be hired to staff the Resource Center part-time. This arrangement would make good use of an experienced teacher's knowledge and provide the Center with a valuable staff person.

Decentralized alternative structures include developing a series of regional centers with one in each planning district or region eventually. A central center in a place such as Richmond could act as a distribution center for these regional centers. In addition to housing many reference materials and samples from publishing companies, each local center could provide a meeting place for learning groups, an office for the regional specialist and/or program planner and be a distribution center for statewide mailing. This would overcome many problems of accessibility for teachers. Another decentralized possibility is modeled after library bookmobiles. Mobile units from the Richmond Resource Center could visit local sites on a regular schedule with samples to browse and borrow. Final decisions about the model for a Resource Center will depend on its relationship to other parts of the system and the availability of resources for its development.

The Resource Center could also play a role publishing and disseminating teachers' project products. For example, teachers may develop curriculum pieces that would be

useful to others in the state, or their dialog journals may help other teachers grapple with similar questions. Desktop publishing now makes it easier than ever before to put locally-produced materials into a form that can be widely disseminated and used.

Newsletter. A state wide newsletter is an important component of the staff development system as we envision it. Like the VAILL summer conferences, a newsletter's function in the system is to facilitate communication, which is essential to community-building among teachers. The newsletter now serves as a communication vehicle between the state office and the field, particularly for administrators. We recommend that another piece be added as soon as possible to provide an avenue for teachers to communicate with one another and the state office. Our suggestions for this added section are:

* The staff development director should act as editor for this section.

* Items for this section should be solicited primarily from teachers.

* The focus of this additional piece should be on instruction and practitioner research.

Additional Issues to be Addressed at the State Level

Increased status and improved working conditions for teachers. When teachers are central to the staff development process, they cannot be marginalized in policy decisions. The presence of representative specialists and administrators on the state advisory committee is a step in the right direction and to continue this trend, teachers should also be included on this advisory committee.

We believe that the majority of teachers want opportunities to improve their practice through the type of staff development system we are recommending, but we also realize that positive incentives will help to counter the logistical difficulties many teachers face in planning extra meetings or activities. State officials should develop teacher advisory groups

to develop recommendations for incentive systems that are responsive to teachers' interests and can be implemented in the existing administrative structures. Such incentives could include salary increases to reflect participation in practitioner research projects. Beyond these incentives, we advocate:

* Better working conditions for teachers, including appropriate rooms and materials in all settings where adult education is offered;

* Progress toward full time positions in adult education; and

* Benefits for part time adult education teachers

as a means for improving the status of our profession and uplifting morale.

During our data gathering activities we became aware of many teachers teaching in rooms where they were unwelcome guests. Some teachers had only one series of books to work with. Others told of crowded and restrictive working conditions in prison classes. Teachers were concerned over the disparity of pay scales from one school district to another and respondents everywhere asked for benefits, such as health care coverage and pensions. These problems are beyond the scope of this evaluation and indeed are beyond the influence of adult education policy makers in some cases. However, an important factor in any proposal which seeks to elevate a profession is to improve the perception of value placed on it by the profession itself and those outside the profession. This objective will require strong leadership from the State office.

Cultural differences and prejudice. We strongly recommend immediately addressing cultural differences and prejudice and their effect on student/teacher relationships. Most staff development workshops avoid fundamental social issues that affect learning such as the distribution of power, social inequality, and prejudice. While we realize that this is a

difficult topic to deal with, it is crucial for building a system in which students' and teachers' dignity is respected and their knowledge valued.

As a teacher inquiry model of staff development becomes implemented, it will raise issues of power and control. It is essential for teachers to have an opportunity to explore these issues in their own work and to address them with their students. Staff development designed to improve understanding among different cultures will result in healthier, more productive relationships between staff and students and can only improve our efforts towards educating and empowering all adults.

## A Suggested Timeline

The State Office of Adult Education has been continuing to develop plans for staff development activities as this evaluation as has been progressing; we understand that change must be implemented in an incremental way, working within the framework of commitments already made and plans already formed. Some of these recommendations have been foreseen by the state staff and already are in the process of being implemented; others will take a long period of time. As suggested in the first section of recommendations, we believe that the first step is to engage the state staff and the directors of staff development activities in a process of reflection and consensus-building around a theory and philosophy of adult literacy education and inquiry-based staff development. We suggest this process begin in the summer of 1992. Job descriptions may need to be rewritten and task descriptions (for activities such as VALE) reconceptualized.

We suggest that the focus during the 92-93 school year be on educating and encouraging administrators, regional program planners and specialists to discuss inquiry-based staff development and experience it for themselves. Our findings lead us to conclude that administrators should be closely involved. VALE 93 would be a good place for these administrators and specialists to share what they experienced with the larger community of

adult educators in the form of plenary meetings and smaller discussion groups. Cluster Training can develop an institute in inquiry-based staff development during this year. VAILL 93 can also begin to incorporate more teachers as workshop leaders, particularly drawing on those who have participated in Research Network projects during the year. Progress towards better trained staff at the Resource Center could begin this year with the help of the advisory committee. Likewise, the newsletter could begin publishing an additional piece.

During the 93-94 school year, we suggest moving the inquiry based experience to the field by piloting the program in several planning districts through invitational institutes. Administrators and specialists, as well as teachers in these pilot areas could engage in this as a form of action research: as they implement the process of forming learning groups and developing practitioner inquiry projects, they could also study the process for insights that will help in implementing it in the following year in additional places. By the end of the year, administrators will no doubt have good ideas about funding issues and teachers will be able to give practical suggestions best the best way to get teachers involved and excited about learning projects. Again, VAILL 94 would be a good place to share these experiences and kick off a state-wide program during the 94-95 school year.

## Continuing Evaluation

It is important that the state have some way to monitor staff development in an ongoing way, particularly as the five-year plan is developed and implemented. This evaluation should examine the learning and participation of teachers along the entire continuum of orientations to their own learning, and it should reinforce critical reflection. As a system is developed, the planning process will address evaluation and monitoring of the system. The key issues we suggested previously for the development of a staff

development system can be used as evaluation criteria. They are:

* Teachers' knowledge is valued.

* Teachers are helped to use what they know to continue learning.

* Activities, attitudes, structures, and values support building a community of teachers as well as a community of teachers and learners.

* There is a focus on the inter-relatedness of all aspects of adult education programs.

* Staff development is viewed as a continuing process involving administrators as well as teachers.

This present report can suggest a more limited focus and approach. We recommend that the state Office of Adult Education develop a data base that allows a survey (and other information, as appropriate) to be mailed directly to the teachers and volunteers in the system. We recommend that the Research Network be responsible for developing, administering and analyzing an annual survey sent to teachers. This survey will differ from the evaluation forms presently distributed by Cluster Training and the Resource Center because they will be sent from an office that is separate from the one being evaluated.

More importantly, however, the focus of the survey will be different from those presently administered. The questionnaires that teachers fill out right now ask for their assessment of the usefulness or quality of the experience in relation to their "needs." They do not ask for teachers to place the workshop or experience with the Resource Center in relation to their learning, however, and this is an important shift. The present surveys treat the teachers' interactions with staff development as discrete events; we recommend a survey that asks teachers to place these interactions in relation to their ongoing practice,

their questions, their participation in other staff development activities, and their situations. The survey would include a number of open-ended questions addressing areas such as:

* Teachers' main areas of growth and learning over the past year;
* Teachers' main areas of continuing questions and development for the next year;
* The range of activities in which teachers participated over the last year that they felt contributed to their learning and growth;
* The role of state level staff development activities in teachers' continuing learning processes;
* The role of regional and local staff development activities and resources;
* Relationships with administrators that enhance or hinder learning.
* New teachers' acquisition of an orientation to responsive, learner centered adult education, and the basic skills and knowledge they need to begin practice consistent with this philosophy.

Specific questions can be asked about participation in VAILL, Cluster Training workshops, use of the Resource Center, articles in Progress, and so on, but teachers also will be asked to explain the process they use to reflect on their work, collaborate with others, and incorporate new ideas.

The Research Network staff will analyze the responses on two levels. First, responses about specific staff development activities will be analyzed. This will yield information about the extent to which the Resource Center staff are more knowledgeable, for example, or the newsletter articles are addressing teachers' interests. Second, the responses will be

analyzed for insights into how teachers reflect on their work; patterns of assumptions, values and beliefs may change over the years as the staff development system begins to have an impact.

Specialists or administrators could convene a meeting of teachers in which the discussion is structured around the survey's questions, providing an opportunity for teachers to begin the reflection needed to respond fully to the questions. Feedback from these Specialists and administrators can help with revising the survey and using the information to refine staff development efforts in the year ahead. A similar process should be set up for administrators.

## Conclusion

In our year-long study of the staff development activities provided for adult educators by the State Office of Adult Education in Virginia, we have discovered a wealth of strengths upon which to build an excellent staff development system. Perhaps the most promising of these strengths is the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers and administrators working in the field. Add to this the willingness of the state staff to embrace new ideas about staff development and we see Adult Education in Virginia poised at the beginning of an exciting period of growth. By adopting a philosophy which values practitioners' knowledge and sees staff development as a continual -- indeed lifelong – process, the Commonwealth of Virginia will enhance the ability of literacy practitioners to work together with adult learners to improve the quality of life for all of its citizens.

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## Appendix

Dear Adult Education Instructor,

A: Survey

This survey is part of a year-long study of staff development activities in Virginia designed for teachers and tutors of adult learners. The purpose of the study is to discover the extent to which presently offered staff development activities, such as the summer institutes (VAILL), the newsletter Progress, the Resource Center, local workshops, etc., meet the needs of teachers and tutors. We appreciate your time and effort answering this survey thoughtfully. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Please feel free to attach additional pages.

This study is funded by the Virginia Department of Education, using Federal 353 funds. The results of this study will be available in published form after August 1992. The researchers involved in this study will also present their findings at VAILL this summer.

When you have finished the survey, please re-fold and staple, with this side showing. Please return the survey to us no later than **December 15.** Thank you!

For more infomation or to make additional comments, contact: Suzanne Cockley, Dayton Learning Center, 1-800-336-6012

_____

_____

_____

stamp

Suzanne Cockley
Dayton Learning Center
P.O. Box 10
Dayton, VA 22821

**General Information**

Which item best describes your teaching situation? (Circle all that apply)

multi-level group classes | single-level group classes | open enrollment | closed enrollment | one-on-one | drop-in center

Total hours of instruction available per week at your instructional site: _____

Total hours you teach per week: _____

Number of teachers working at your site: _____

Average number of adult students you teach per week in your program: _____

Which term(s) best describes your students' programs? (Circle all that apply)

Literacy ABE GED ESL Other, please explain: _____

_____

**Background/Training**

How long have you been teaching adults? _____

Please rate your initial training to do this type of teaching:

5 4 3 2 1

very helpful not helpful didn't get any ____

Briefly describe your initial training including where it was, who provided it, what was covered, and how long it lasted:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe your formal educational background:

year completed degree: _____ degree:_____

major: _____

Please list any additional graduate courses you have taken pertaining to adult education:

_____

_____

How often do you attend workshops or conferences to learn more about adult education? (Include VAILL, cluster training, and other workshops)

3+ per year 2 per year less than 1 per year

Do you read about teaching adults on a regular basis? ____ If so, what books or periodicals have you found helpful? Please list and explain why they are helpful: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Progress Newsletter (quarterly adult education newsletter)

Do you receive this newsletter? _____ If so, Please rate this newsletter:

5 4 3 2 1

very helpful not helpful

What would improve this publication? _____

_____

_____

**Adult Resource Center at Virginia Commonwealth University**

Are you aware of the Resource Center? _____ If yes, please rate the helpfulness of this Center when you have requested information:

5 4 3 2 1

very helpful not helpful Never requested info ___

What would make the Resource Center more helpful to you? _____

_____

_____

_____

**Cluster Training**

Are you aware of the Cluster Training? _____ If yes, please rate the helpfulness of Cluster Training:

5 4 3 2 1

very helpful not helpful Never participated ___

What would make the Cluster Training more helpful to you? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Reflective Teaching**

If you have been teaching for more than four years, are there things you do differently now than you did 2 years ago? _____ If so, please describe briefly how your teaching has changed and what contributed to the change:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

When you read or hear in a workshop about a new way of teaching, do you often actually try it out with your student(s)? Are there things that make it easier or harder to try new approaches?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Where do you go for help with a teaching problem? How do you get information?

_____

_____

_____

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What puzzles you about your teaching experiences? _____

_____

_____

_____

Describe the type of help with your own skill development that you would find most helpful at this stage in your teaching career: _____

_____

_____

**Additional Comments:** ( Attach additional sheets as needed) For example, What do you want the state administration to know about your experiences with staff development? What would you like to see provided? What would you like to see discontinued? Thank you!

## Survey Sample Characteristics

Total number of hours you teach each week (n=61):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1-4 hours | 56.0% | (34) |
| 4.5-8 hours | 18.0% | (11) |
| 8.5-20 | 6.6% | (4) |
| 20+ | 16.0% | (10) |
| not teaching | 3.3% | ( 2) |

Number of teachers at your site (n=51):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 teachers | 73.0% | (37) |
| 6-10 | 7.8% | (4) |
| More than 10 | 19.6% | (10) |

Number of students you teach per week (n=66)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 students | 41.0% | (27) |
| 6-10 students | 7.6% | (5) |
| 11-20 students | 21.0% | (14) |
| 20-30 students | 12.0% | (8) |
| More than 30 students | 18.0% | (12) |

How long have you been teaching adults (n=63):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0-2 years | 40.0% | (25) |
| 2.5-5 years | 32.1% | (20) |
| 5.5-10 years | 13.0% | (8) |
| More than 10 years | 16.0% | (10) |

Attend workshops and conferences (n=64):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 or more times a year | 38.0% | (26) |
| Twice a year | 33.0% | (21) |
| Once a year or less | 30.0% | (19) |

Initial training (n=62):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Laubach or Literacy Volunteers of America | 53.0% | (33) |
| None | 24.0% | (15) |
| Other (college course, ABE workshop, observing other teachers) | 23.0% | (14) |

# DAYTON LEARNING CENTER

October 1, 1991

Dear Instructor,

Dr. Hanna Fingeret and I have received a grant to conduct a study of staff development activities in Virginia which are designed for teachers and tutors of adult learners. The purpose of this study is to discover the extent to which presently-offered staff development activities, such as the summer institutes (VAILL), the newsletter Progress, the Resource Center, and local workshops meet the needs of teachers and tutors. Since the project began in July 1991, we have attended both VAILLs and interviewed participants, as well as the individuals responsible for coordinating these conferences, the newsletter, cluster training and the Resource Center. A "pencil and paper" survey is being prepared at the moment to be mailed out in October to teachers and tutors.

Important as these sources of information are, we anticipate that the most valuable insights will come from in-depth discussions with various groups of teachers and tutors. We will be conducting these interviews at six sites around the state, with eight teachers invited to attend each one. We would like to conduct an interview in the Richmond area on Monday, November 11, 1991. The group interview will be held at the Adult Career Development Center at 119 W. Leigh Street, room 309, from 1:00 p.m. until 2:30 p.m. We invite you to participate and contribute your expertise.

We will reimburse mileage at $.22 per mile and pay participants a $25 honorarium. All interviews will be tape recorded to be transcribed for our use only - not to be published. All interviews are strictly confidential.

If you would like to participate, please write to me at the address below or call the 800 number and ask for Sue or Laura. We will invite the first eight interested teachers to participate by sending you a note confirming the interview. Please write or call by October 25.

*Thank you for your time and effort. I hope to see you in November!*

Sincerely,

Sue Cockley

Sue Cockley
Project Director

108

SC/lmd

P.O. BOX 10 ◊ 290 MILL STREET ◊ DAYTON ◊ VIRGINIA ◊ 22821
A Massanutten Technical Center Community Education Facility
703-879-2833 800-336-6012

## INTERVIEW SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

| Role | ABE/ ESL | Age (decade) | Gender | Race | Rural/ Urban | Yrs. Exp. in Ad. Ed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 5 |
| SPEC/TEACH | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 10 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 60s | F | B | U | 19 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 10 |
| SPECIALIST | | 30s | F | W | R | 10 |
| SPECIALIST | | 40s | F | W | R | 10 |
| TEACHER | ABE | | F | W | R | |
| ADMIN (vol) | | | F | W | R | 4 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 22s | F | W | R | 22 |
| EDD | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 5 |
| TEACHER | | | F | W | R | 1.5 |
| VOLUNTEER | ABE | | F | W | R | 3 |
| TEACHER | ABE | | M | W | U | 3.5 |
| TEACHER | | | F | W | | 2 |
| TEACHER | ABE | | F | W | U | 3 |
| TEACHER | ABE | | F | W | | 2 |
| ADMIN | ABE | 40s | F | B | R | 20 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 18 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 3 |
| LIT BD MEMBER | | | F | W | | |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | M | W | | 24 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | | |

| Role | ABE/ ESL | Age (decade) | Gender | Race | Rural/ Urban | Yrs. Exp. in Ad. Ed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SPEC/ADMIN | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 4 |
| VOLUNTEER | ESL | | F | W | | 3 |
| TEACHER | ESL | | F | W | R | 7 |
| TEACH/TRAIN | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | 15 |
| STATE STAFF | | | F | W | | 15+ |
| TEACHER/TRAIN | | 50s | F | W | | |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | U | 13 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | .35 |
| TEACHER | AME | 30s | M | W | U | 3 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 4 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 50s | F | W | U | 3 |
| LIT VOLUNT | ESL/ ABE | 60s | F | W | R | 4 |
| VOLUNTEER | ESL/ ABE | 60s | M | W | R | 4 |
| VOL TEACH | ABE | 50s | F | W | R | 3+ |
| VOLUNTEER | ESL | 30s | F | W | R | 3 |
| VOLUNTEER | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 3 |
| VOLUNTEER | ESL/ ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 2+ |
| VOL ADMIN | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 4 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 1.5 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 2 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 7 |
| TEACHER | ESL/ ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 2.5 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | R | 4 |

| Role | ABE/ ESL | Age (decade) | Gender | Race | Rural/ Urban | Yrs. Exp. in Ad. Ed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TEACHER | ABE | 50s | F | W | R | 3 |
| TEACHER | ESL/ ABE | 50s | F | W | U | 20 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | B | U | 1 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 30s | F | W | U | 3 |
| TEACHER | ESL/ ABE | 40s | F | W | U | 3+ |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | B | U | 6+ |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | B | U | 11 |
| ADMIN/EMPLSPEC | ABE | 50s | M | W | U | 1 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | 7 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | 3 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 30s | F | W | U | 10 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | 10 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 50s | F | B | U | 8 |
| TEACHER | ESL | 50s | F | W | U | 14 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | M | W | R | 14 |
| TEACHER | ESL/ ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 18 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 50s | F | W | R | 9 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 50s | F | B | R | 3 |
| TEACH/TRAIN | ESL | 40s | F | W | U | |
| TEACHER | ESL | 40s | M | W | R | NEW |
| STATE STAFF | ESL/ ABE | 50s | F | W | | |
| STATE STAFF | ABE | 30s | M | W | | |
| STATE STAFF | ESL/ ABE | 30s | F | W | | |

| Role | ABE/ ESL | Age (decade) | Gender | Race | Rural/ Urban | Yrs. Exp. in Ad. Ed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STATE DIRECT | ESL ABE | 40s | M | W | | |
| STATE STAFF | | 50s | M | W | | |
| ADMIN | ESL | 50s | F | W | U | |
| ADMIN | ABE/ ESL | 40s | F | W | U | 5 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 60s | F | W | R | NEW |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | B | R | 2 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | NEW |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 15 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 10 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | NEW |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | U | 5 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 15 |
| SPEC | | 40s | F | W | R | 3 |
| SPEC | | 30s | F | W | U | 1 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | F | W | U | 2 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 30s | M | W | R | 12 |
| ADMIN | ABE/ ESL | 30s | F | B | U | |
| ADMIN | ABE/ ESL | 40s | F | B | U | |
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | M | B | U | NEW |
| ADMIN | ABE/ ESL | 50s | M | B | U | 10 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 20s | M | B | U | 4 |
| TEACHER | ABE | 20s | M | B | U | 4 |
| SOC SERV. | | 40s | M | B | U | |

| Role | ABE/ ESL | Age (decade) | Gender | Race | Rural/ Urban | Yrs. Exp. in Ad. Ed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TEACHER | ABE | 40s | F | W | R | 4 |
| VOL ADM/TUTOR | | 40s | M | W | R | 3 |
| ADMIN | ABE/ ESL | 50s | M | W | R | 5 |
| TEACHER/TRAIN | ESL | 50s | F | W | U | 8 |
| VOL ADM/TUTOR | | 50s | F | W | R | 4 |
| ADMIN | ESL | 40s | M | Other | U | |